

POSTERIOR FUSION SURGERIES

AFTER THE SURGERY: THE FIRST 6 WEEKS

The first 2-3 weeks after surgery are usually the toughest. It seems that the patient's who are getting what they need nutritionally have the best outcome and recover the fastest. Take this time to slowly return to your normal activities. It is normal to have pain after surgery. If you have pain that the pain medication does not help to reduce, then you should call the office. For most patients, this time is the most painful after surgery.

AFTER THE SURGERY: 3-6 MONTHS

At this point, you may have returned to work and most of your normal daily activities. Since the bone is not completely healed at this point, your pain level should be reduced, but you may still need pain medications to help with the pain. Slowly wean off the pain medications. Please remain off NSAIDS, unless your doctor has advised you otherwise. It usually takes up to 6-9 months before the bone is completely fused. You will return to the office at 3 months and then again at 6 months post-op for a follow-up and x-rays.

AFTER THE SURGERY: 1 YEAR

At this point, most if not all of your pain should be resolved. You will return to the office for a follow-up and x-rays. You should be able to do most, if not all of your normal activities. It takes up to a year for your pain level to return to an acceptable level or it may have resolved by now.

AFTER THE SURGERY

Some things that play an important part of your recovery include:

- Good nutrition
- Exercise
- Steroid dose pack
- Not smoking
- Pain medications
- Remain off NSAIDS
- Returning to Work
- Rest
- Wearing the collar

Nutrition is one of the most important aspects to help promote healing. (This is not the time to diet). Please try to eat foods that are higher in protein and do your best to eat soft foods that help you maintain an adequate daily amount of calories. Your body is in turmoil after undergoing the surgery. Food is the energy your body needs to help it recover. Soft foods that may be helpful include:

Yogurt, smoothies, ice creams, Jell-O, mashed potatoes, soups, broths, Italian ice, applesauce, soft meats with gravies, soft fruits and vegetables and any other foods that you like which are easy to swallow. Ensure and other similar products are available if you are not able to eat soft foods.

For our diabetic patients:

It is very important to maintain a more normal blood sugar during your recovery period. Please note that if you need to take the steroids for swallowing problems, that your blood sugar may become very high. Please notify your primary care physician or the physician that helps you maintain your blood sugars for recommendations as to how to take your diabetic medications to help to control your blood sugars. Elevated blood sugars actually interfere with the bone healing. Glucerna is available as a protein replacement for diabetics, only if needed.

Exercise is an important part of your recovery, not only because it helps the bone heal, but it prepares you to return to your normal activities. An exercise brochure is available from our office if you need it.

Steroid dose pack: Steroids can be helpful to decrease postoperative inflammation. The dose pack is a steroid medication that should only be taken if needed. If you are having problems with inflammation, please call the office to notify your doctor so that a steroid dose pack can be called into your pharmacy. It is best to take all the first days dosage at one time, and then follow the instructions on the package for the remaining amount of medication.

Not Smoking: Remaining free of cigarettes and any other form of nicotine is a must after your surgery. Many people refer to cigarettes as their

friends. **WRONG**--they are your enemy. Not only do they increase your pain level, they interfere with bone and nerve healing. Please consider this before you put a cigarette to your lips.

Pain Medications: Your doctor generally prescribes two different pain medications. Which one you receive is based on your prior narcotic use and the expected amount of pain from surgery. Oxycodone products are for severe pain and cannot be called into the pharmacy over the phone. You must have a written prescription. Hydrocodone products are used when the pain is more controlled. This medication can be called in over the phone to the pharmacy. Make sure to always take the pain pills with food or you may become nauseated and then start to vomit. As discussed above, food is important to promote healing. **If you start to vomit, do not take any more of the pain medication, since this will cause you to vomit more.** Avoiding the medication that caused the vomiting usually will resolve the problem. If you continue to vomit, call the office for guidance. If it is after hours or on the weekend, you will be directed to the answering service. Your pain should diminish after taking the pain medication, but it may not be completely gone. The pain should be reduced enough that you can function and you should be able to do normal activities.

Remain off NSAIDs: To help promote the bone to heal, it is best to remain off all NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications). Examples of NSAIDs- Advil, Aleve, Motrin, Ibuprofen, Celebrex, Relafen, Voltaren, and Arthrotec, to name a few. If you are unsure of a medication, please call your pharmacist or the office to determine if the medication is an anti-inflammatory.

Returning to Work: It is difficult to determine when each person is able to return to work. Try to increase your activity level each day to see if you can do all that you need to do for your work environment. If you need a nap or two during the day, you are probably not ready to return to work. A point to consider--your work needs you back at 100%. If you have the vacation or sick time available, it is time worth taking, if needed.

Rest is also important after surgery. But remember you do not need to be on total bed rest. In fact, total bed rest can slow your recovery. Slowly

increase your activities and rest as needed. Doing too much after surgery causes exhaustion and does not promote healing. Listen to your body, and let it guide you. If one activity causes soreness and/or pain, stop the activity and then rest. Slowly increase new activities daily to help you to resume your normal activities. Think of the surgery as the flu--you need time to recover and return to normal.

Collar: In some cases, your doctor may order a collar. **Wearing the collar** as your doctor has instructed is of great importance. The collar limits your motion, and thus allows the bone to fuse by taking stress off the bone graft. Sleeping with the collar may be the most important since you cannot control the position of your neck while you sleep. The collar may be uncomfortable during sleep. Please wear the collar. It will help you heal.