

Recovering at Home after Surgery

You are about to go home after your spine surgery. You and your family will find these instructions helpful when preparing for your recovery. You will find that every day gets a little better and before long you will feel more like yourself.

Wound Care: You will go home with a bandage covering the spine incision. It can be changed every other day until you are 7 to 10 days out from surgery. If the bandage becomes wet or soiled sooner, go ahead and change it. Just remove the bandage and replace it with a clean dressing, folding a 4X4 gauze pad in half, with a little bit of tape to hold it in place. Do not use any ointments or cleaners on the incision. Leave the steri-strips in place until they begin to loosen and come off. Be sure to call your doctor's office if there is drainage from the wound or if the incision is getting red and more tender.

Bathing: As long as the incision is closed and there is no wound drainage, you can shower after 5 to 7 days from surgery. Before that time, you will need to sponge bathe. Your hair can be washed in the sink until you are able to get into the shower.

Activity restrictions: We would like you to be up and walking throughout your house. You will find that each day you will have more energy and less pain and you will be able to tolerate more and more walking. If you are doing well, you can go outside for a walk. In the beginning you will need to take a few rest periods throughout the day to lie down. Your family will help you decide when you are comfortable enough and have enough energy to make an outing away from home. You should not do any more strenuous activity than walking until you get the clearance from your doctor. Do not lift any more than 10 pounds which is about the weight of a gallon jug of milk. Be careful not to lift pets or young children.

Diet and Nutrition: When you go home you can return to your normal diet. You should drink plenty of fluids and eat fruits and high fiber foods, like bran cereals or muffins to help keep your bowels moving. Eating smaller more frequent meals may be best to start out with if your appetite has not returned to normal. Make sure you have some food in your stomach before

taking your pain medications. Your body needs extra calories and protein for the first 6 weeks after surgery to heal. You will find a handout in this folder that gives ideas of foods to add to your diet to be sure you get good nutrition.

A word about constipation: It is very common for people to become constipated while on pain medications. You should be taking a stool softener every day until off the narcotic pain medications. If eating high fiber foods is not enough to keep your bowels regular, you may need added help to get you going. **Miralax** or **Senna** can be helpful and are both over the counter and sold at your local pharmacy or grocery store. Just follow the dosing directions on the package. When you have stopped the pain meds and your bowels have returned to normal, you can stop taking these medications.

Returning to school: Most kids need to recover at home for 3 to 4 weeks before returning to school. Most schools can provide a homebound teacher to help you keep up with assignments. School will take a lot of energy in the beginning. Many kids find that the easiest way to transition back to school is to go for a few partial days at first, then advance to full days. You will have to stay out of gym and sports for the next few months, until your doctor gives you permission to participate. You will need to remember your lifting restrictions in school. Your backpack probably weighs more than 10 pounds. Find out if it is possible to get 2 sets of books so you can keep one set at home and don't have to carry as much in your backpack. Another option is to use a bag on wheels or to have a friend carry your books for you. Let us know if you need any notes for school to make the transition easier.

Return to driving: Driving is usually restricted for 4-6 weeks. You must be completely off any narcotic medications and fully able to turn your head over your shoulder without pain to safely operate the car.

When to call your doctor's office: You can always call if you have a question or problem related to the surgery. Be sure to call if there are any signs of infection such as fever over 101 F, wound drainage, redness and pain around the incision. Changes in sensation in your legs, a new weakness or numbness or tingling in your legs, losing control of your bladder or bowels all can be signs of neurological changes and need to be called in. Call if the pain is not controlled by the pain medication.