

## Treating Your Pain at Home

Your spine surgery has caused you pain and will need to be treated at home with medications and other comfort measures. For the first few days at home, take your medicine on a regular schedule, like you did in the hospital. The amount of pain changes over the first week after surgery. The amount of pain should be checked often so that you will get the right amount of medicine for your pain. Over the next 2-3 weeks, your pain will decrease and you will need less pain medication. Here are some helpful suggestions to help you manage your pain.

### What kinds of medications will I take?

**Opioids:** Pain medicines like oxycodone are used for severe pain. These medicines will make you sleepy and also constipated. They can also slow down your breathing, make you dizzy and can cause nausea.

**Acetaminophen or Tylenol** is a pain medicine that helps with mild to moderate pain. It can also be taken at the same time as the opioids to boost your pain relief. There is a maximum amount that you can take each day. Doses that are too high can harm your liver.

**Diazepam or Valium** is used to decrease your muscle spasms. This medication can also make you very sleepy and can make you dizzy.

### When should I take these medications?

- Take your opioid every 4-6 hours around the clock to provide steady pain relief
- If you are prescribed 1-2 tablets you will need to choose how many to take around the clock for your pain. If you choose to take 1 tablet, you can always add the second tablet if the pain is severe (over a pain score of 6).
- For the first few days you may want to awake during the night to take your pain medicine. This will help to keep your pain level down so you won't wake up in severe pain.
- Take your Tylenol every 4 hours around the clock to provide steady pain relief
- Take your Valium just when you are having muscle spasms.

## **What should I do if the pain medicines are not working and the pain is getting worse?**

- If you are taking the full amount of your pain medication and nothing is working, you need to call your doctor's office. You can also try other comfort measures such as changing your position, stretching and massage.

## **When and how do I decrease these medications?**

- Take your Tylenol around the clock until you come back for your first check up.
- If you're too sleepy or too dizzy, you should decrease the opioids and valium you take by spreading the time in between doses or decreasing the number of tablets you take at a time.
- Stop your Valium after 7-10 days or sooner if you are not having spasms.
- In about 10 days you should start decreasing your opioids because the pain from surgery is usually less.
  - First, spread the time between opioids from 4 to 6 hours or from 6 to 8 hours.
  - Change from taking the meds around the clock to 3 times a day when you need them, such as in the morning, before activities and at bedtime.
- If your pain level is low and you are comfortable with only Tylenol, you can stop your opioids

## **Will I get addicted to the opiod medications?**

You will not get addicted to your opioids. If you take opioids for a long time your body becomes dependent on the drug. If the opioid is cut down or stopped too quickly, you could have symptoms of opioid withdrawal. These are sweating, chills, headache, and nausea.

## **How do I keep track of my medicines?**

Sometimes it is hard to remember the times and the amounts of medication you've taken. A simple chart can be helpful to record your pain levels and the medication and is included in your folder.

## **What other things can I do to help with my pain?**

Many non-drug therapies can help you relax and decrease your pain. Remember to use the ones that work for you: deep breathing, music, massage, watching TV, having friends visit, a milk shake and a warm blanket.