

Activities of Daily Living After Spinal Surgery

Self-care for safety and healing

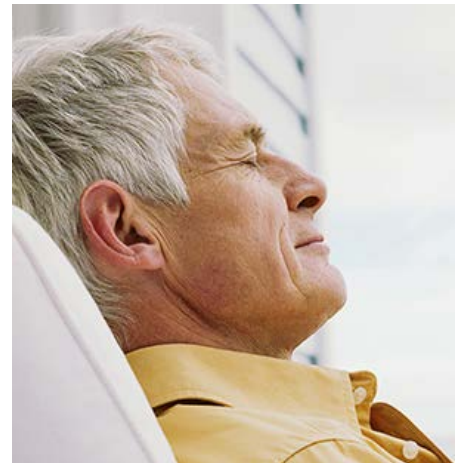
This handout gives self-care guidelines to follow after spinal surgery. Follow these guidelines to protect your spine and help you recover.

Self-care

Follow the guidelines in this handout to do your daily activities. At first, you may need to take a lot of breaks. Be sure to include rest times in your plan for each day.

Also, make sure you:

- Get a good night's sleep.
- Get dressed every day.
- Slowly resume the hobbies and other activities you enjoy.



Give yourself plenty of time to rest as you recover from your surgery.

Protect Your Spine

Until your healthcare team tells you otherwise, remember to follow the **BLTs** for **B**ending, **L**ifting, and **T**wisting:

- **Bending:** Do **not** bend your spine.
- **Lifting:** Do **not** lift more than 10 pounds. (A gallon of milk weighs about 8 pounds.) Your doctor will tell you how much you can lift at your follow-up visits.
- **Twisting:** Do **not** twist your back or neck.

Sleeping

- Use a mattress with good support. Sleep in the position that is most comfortable for you.
- Using a small neck pillow or a rolled towel under your neck is helpful if you are wearing a neck brace.
- When lying on your back, place a pillow under your knees to lessen pulling on your back muscles.
- When lying on your side, place a pillow between your legs.

Getting Dressed

Do **not** twist your upper body when you get dressed and undressed. Wear loose-fitting tops so that you can put them on and take them off without twisting.

Showers

- You **cannot** take a bath, sit in a hot tub, go swimming, or use a sauna until your incision is fully healed.
- Do **not** expose your incision to water until your incision is no longer draining.
- When you shower:
 - Cover your incision to keep it from getting wet. Do **not** rub the incision.
 - Wash and dry as far as you can without bending. Have someone else wash and dry the rest of your body.
 - Apply a new dry gauze dressing after your shower.

Wound Care

- You may see a small amount of drainage from your incision. This should slowly lessen and then stop.
- Keep your incision dry and clean. Change the dry gauze dressing at least once a day.
- Do **not** apply creams, ointments, lotions, or powders to your incision.
- After your incision stops draining, you do not need to use the gauze dressing.
- Do **not** peel off any of the skin glue applied during surgery.
- Do **not** smoke or use nicotine products. Nicotine can slow or prevent wound healing.
- **For 12 weeks after your surgery**, do **not** take any *non-steroidal anti-inflammatory* (NSAIDS) medicines such as ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn). These medicines slow bone growth and healing.

Activities

- **Avoid strenuous pushing, pulling, and lifting.** Have someone else for help with activities such as lifting groceries, doing household chores or yard work, or picking up children, pets, and other items.

- **For 2 weeks, limit long rides in a car.** If you need to be in the car for a long time, get out often and stretch for 5 to 10 minutes. Do this at least every 30 to 45 minutes.
- **Do not drive if:**
 - You are wearing a brace.
 - You are taking prescription pain medicine. These drugs slow your reaction time and make driving unsafe.
- **Keep moving.** Walk to 2 to 3 times daily. Gently swing your arms while walking. Start slowly and increase your distance as you feel stronger.
- **Practice good posture.** Sit for about 20 to 30 minutes at a time in a chair with a straight back. Slowly increase the time you sit like this, as you can.

Sexual Activity

When you can resume sexual activity depends on how quickly you recover after surgery. It is best to wait until your follow-up visit to talk with your doctor about when it is OK. If you have sex, be sure to follow your precautions.

When to Call

Call the clinic nurse at **206.744.9340** if you have questions about your health or have any of these symptoms:

- Fever above 100°F (37.8°C)
- More redness, heat, drainage, or swelling at your incision
- New or worse pain
- Severe headache
- Feeling very tired
- Change in your bowel movements or bladder control
- New numbness in your arms or legs

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or other healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Weekdays 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.,
call Harborview Spine Center:
206.744.9340

After hours and on weekends
and holidays, call
206.744.2500.