Pain Control After Spine Surgery

What to expect

Pain control is a major part of your care after surgery. We will do all we can to help make you comfortable.

Our goal is to control your pain so you can do the activities that will help you recover. This does not mean you will be pain-free. You will have some discomfort as you recover and become more active.

You are a vital member of your care team. We will ask for your feedback, and will work with you to manage your pain.

How is pain managed after surgery?

You will take prescription pain medicine (opioids) after surgery. Opioids help treat severe pain after surgery. They are not used to treat other types of long-term pain.

Pain caused by surgery is called acute pain. This type of pain is part of the healing process. It does not last a long time. We will treat your acute pain for no more than 42 days (6 weeks) after your surgery.

Surgery may also increase your chronic (long-term) pain for a short time. But, your need for medicine for chronic pain should decrease after surgery.

While You Are in the Hospital

- We will start to slowly taper (decrease) your opioid dose.
- We will teach you how to taper your use of opioids at home. At first, take your pain medicine at the times prescribed. Then start to take lower doses and wait longer between doses.
- Talk with your nurse or surgeon about your pain control plan and recovery goals. Review your plan to taper and then stop taking opioids at home.

We will teach you how to taper your use of opioids at home.
Pain Control at Home

- Be aware that pain medicines may take 20 to 30 minutes to start to work. They may not reach their full effect for almost 1 hour.

- Use non-medicine methods of pain control such as ice, relaxation, breathing, music, reading, and other distractions.

- Moving around can increase pain from surgery, but activity is important for your recovery. Time your dose of pain medicine so that you take it before activities such as getting dressed, doing exercises, or sitting at the table for a meal.

- Your prescription may say to take a dose of opioids every 3 hours. But, most patients take the medicine less often and can stop taking opioids within 1 to 2 weeks.

- If you still need opioids after 6 weeks, talk with your primary care provider (PCP) or your chronic pain clinic.

- **Set up an appointment with the provider who prescribes your chronic pain medicine before your opioids run out.**

For Your Safety

- Do **not** drink alcohol while taking opioids. Together, these can make you dizzy and slow your respiratory system. They can even cause death.

- Do **not** drive or run machinery while taking prescription pain medicine.

Constipation Tips

Constipation is common with some pain medicines. To help with this:

- Increase the fiber in your diet. Eat plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.

- Drink lots of fluids (6 to 8 glasses a day).

- Talk with your doctor about medicines to help relieve constipation.

Who to Call

- Call the Spine Clinic Nurse at 206.744.9340 if your pain is not well controlled or if it gets worse.

- Call the Orthopaedic Pharmacy at 206.744.8701 if you:
  - Have questions about your pain medicines or need a refill.
  - Want advice on how to taper your opioid use after surgery

- To refill muscle relaxant medicines, call your PCP.