

## Activities of Daily Living After Spinal Injury or Surgery

*This handout gives guidelines to follow after spinal injury or surgery. Following these guidelines will protect your spine and help you recover.*

### General Tips

- Use the guidelines in this handout to do your regular daily activities.
- At first, you may need lots of rest breaks. Plan your days to include times to rest.

Also, be sure to:

- Get a good night's sleep.
- Get dressed every day.
- Eat healthy meals.
- Slowly resume the hobbies or social activities you enjoy.

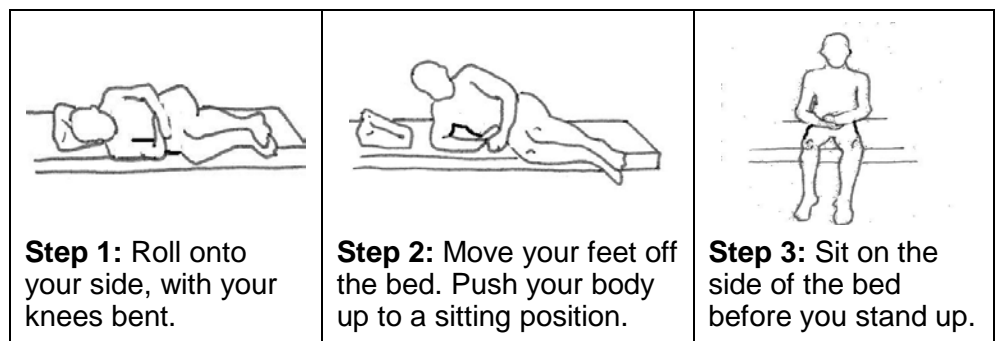
### Protect Your Spine

For the first 4 to 12 weeks after your surgery, or until your health care team tells you otherwise, remember to follow the **BLTs** for bending, lifting, and twisting:

- **Bending:** Do **not** bend your spine.
- **Lifting:** Do **not** lift more than 5 **or** 10 pounds. Your doctor will tell you how much you can lift. (A gallon of milk weighs 8 pounds.)
- **Twisting:** Do **not** twist your back or neck.

### Getting Out of Bed

Use the 3-step “logroll” method to get out of bed:



## Getting into Bed

1. Sit far back from the edge of the bed, near the top  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the bed.
2. Lie on your side.
3. Lift your legs onto the bed with your knees bent.
4. Roll onto your back. Keep your hips and knees together as you do this, like a log.

Your doctor will tell you if you need to wear a back brace and when to wear it. Your occupational therapist can show you how to use it.

## Standing Up from a Bed, Chair, and Toilet

- **Use elevation** for sitting, if needed. You may want to put a pillow or foam cushion on your chair and use a raised toilet seat.
- Do not sit on deep or overstuffed chairs and couches.
- Your occupational therapist may recommend using a bedside commode or grab bars at home.

## Getting Dressed

- Wear loose-fitting tops so that you do not twist your upper body when you put them on and take them off.
- If it is hard for you to reach your feet, you can use a sock aid, long-handled reacher, or a long-handled shoehorn for putting on and taking off your socks, shoes, and pants. Your occupational therapist can show you how to use these.

## Showers

- Have someone help you the first few times you shower, until you feel sure about your safety.
- To avoid slipping, wear sandals, shoes, or socks with non-slip tread when you shower.
- Your occupational therapist may also recommend a shower chair or tub-transfer bench to sit on in the shower. This will make you safer and help you save your energy.

## Specific Activities

For **6 to 12 weeks after surgery**, or until your health care team tells you otherwise:

- **Have someone else do chores** such as vacuuming, sweeping, mopping, raking, digging, mowing the lawn, or other “heavy” housework.

- **Avoid lifting.** Ask someone else to lift anything that weighs more than your doctor said you are allowed to lift. This includes groceries, laundry, children, pets, or other items.
- **Do not open** tight jar lids, stuck windows, or heavy doors. Ask someone for help.
- **Do not soak** in a bathtub or hot tub, swim, or use a sauna. You can shower when your doctor tells you it is OK to.
- **Do not bowl, ski, run, ride a horse,** or do anything else that causes you to bend or twist your upper body or bounce a lot.
- **Do not drive** until you are no longer taking prescription pain medicine. These drugs slow your reaction time and make driving unsafe.

### **Sexual Activity**

When you can resume sexual activity depends on your rate of recovery after surgery. Use common sense, follow your precautions, and do not be afraid to ask for advice from your doctor.

### **Be Patient with Yourself**

It is normal to feel frustrated, stressed, tired, or depressed after a major injury or surgery. Some people feel they are not as sharp mentally. Do not make yourself do mentally challenging tasks. Talk with your health care provider if you have these feelings and feel overwhelmed by them.

#### **Questions?**

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Occupational Therapy:  
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