

# Back Care After Surgery

To help you as you recover

This handout explains what exercises you should and should not do while recovering after surgery. It also shows basic exercises and describes how to increase your activities safely.



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## Add or Keep Exercise in Your Routine

Exercise can help reduce the risk of problems after your surgery, such as blood clots or infection. Exercise can also help you reduce pain, move independently, and recover faster.

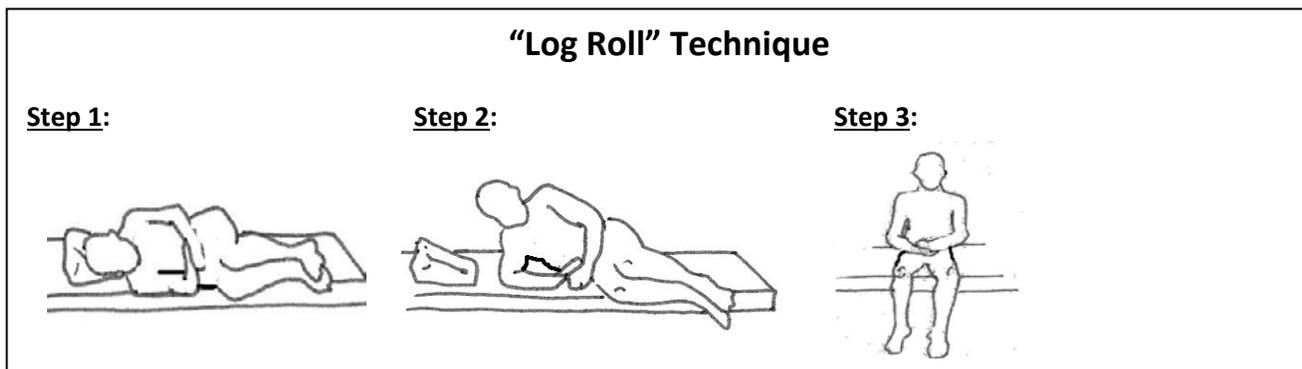
Exercise after surgery should include daily walking. Your physical therapist may give you more exercises that will help you improve your strength, endurance, and balance.

## What to Expect After Surgery

You will get out of bed within the first day. During the first few days after surgery, you will practice standing, walking, and climbing stairs to prepare to go home. Your physical therapist, occupational therapist, and nurses will help you learn and practice how to move safely. **Please call for help before you get up to reduce your risk of falling.**

## Precautions After Spinal Surgery

- Avoid bending, twisting, and lifting more than 10 pounds (about the weight of a gallon of milk).
- If you need to reach down to pick something up, squat or kneel instead of bending forward.
- Change your sitting and standing posture throughout the day.
- Ask for help whenever you need it.
- At your follow-up appointment, ask your doctor when you can drive, play sports, and return to work.
- When you get in and out of bed, use a "log roll" technique to prevent twisting or bending too much (see image below).



## Walking

Walking is one of the most important exercises to help you recover after surgery. Staying active helps you heal more quickly, reduces muscle stiffness, and strengthens your muscles. After your surgery you should walk every day.

When you get home:

- Begin walking for about 6 to 7 minutes at a time, or the distance you walked in the hospital.
- Start on flat ground.
- Increase the amount of time that you walk by 1 to 2 minutes each day.
- Slowly work up to walking at least 30 minutes, 3 to 5 times a week.

Your physical therapist may give you more exercises to help you strengthen specific muscles. Talk with your care team if you have any questions about exercising.



***Daily walking is an important part of recovering after surgery.***

## When to Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor if:

- Your incision becomes red, swollen, tender, “squishy,” or begins to drain.
- You have a fever of 101° F (38.3° C) or higher.
- You have nausea or are vomiting.
- You cannot take your medicine (for any reason).

At your follow-up visit, ask your doctor about starting a physical therapy treatment plan.

### QUESTIONS?

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