

Rehabilitation and Recovery Program After Thoracic and Lumbar Spine Procedures

Precautions

- Do not lift more than 10 pounds (a gallon of water weighs about 8 pounds).
- Keep objects close to your torso as you carry them.
- Avoid bending, twisting, pushing, or pulling.
- Do not sit for more than 30 minutes at a time. Take standing breaks to “decompress” your spine.
- Practice good posture at all times.

Therapy Goals

1. To become as independent as possible with your mobility and exercises.
2. To use proper body mechanics when moving around and doing activities of daily living (ADLs).
3. To understand the reasons for these precautions and activity guidelines:
 - a. Reducing post-surgical pain
 - b. Reducing the chance of post-surgical irritation and *nerve root adherence* (which is when scar tissue joins muscle to the nerve).

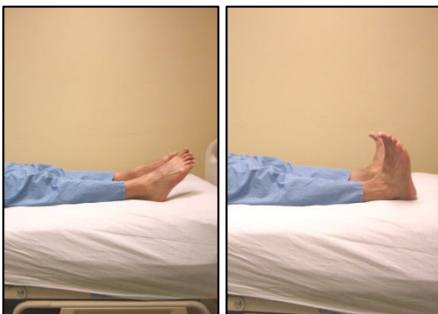
Posture

- When standing, keep your head aligned directly over your shoulders, hips, and ankles.
- “Activate” your abdominal muscles and “grow tall.” Maintain this good upright posture to strengthen the muscles that support your back.
- Avoid soft chairs. Choose chairs that support good posture. You may roll up a towel or use a lumbar pillow behind your back for support (see the image with the check mark).

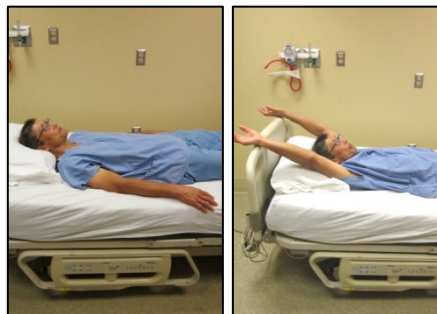


Post-operative Exercises

It is important for you to do these exercises the first few days after surgery. This will help make sure you do not have problems with your lungs or with blood clots. These will also help you move easier in bed.



Ankle Pumps



Deep Breathing with Overhead Reaching
(while sitting, standing, or lying down)



Heel Slides

Body Mechanics

- It is important to use proper body mechanics to protect your spine by keeping it aligned.
- When getting in and out of bed: Log-roll to your side, and sit up at the edge of the bed without twisting. Then stand.
- This reduces strain on your spine and keeps it aligned.



- When lying on your side, put a pillow between your legs to minimize twisting in your lower back. A pillow in front of your torso will keep your upper body from twisting.



Warm-up Exercises to Do Before Walking

These exercises will help warm up your lumbar spine and hip and knee joints before walking. If your legs are weak, your physical therapist may recommend heel raises and knee bends to strengthen them.



Marching in Place



Heel Raises



Knee Bends

Post-operative Walking Program

- **It is important for you to walk every day.** Walking helps your heart, lungs, and spine get stronger.
- Walk at a comfortable pace and **stand up straight** with whatever walking device you use.
- Walk on level ground (a smooth surface if possible) for the first several weeks.
- When you first get home, you may only be able to take short walks. Aim to take a few short walks each day. Start by walking in your home and gradually increase time and distance each day.
- **2- to 3-week goal:** Walk for 30 minutes, 7 times a week.
- **3- to 6-week goal:** Walk for 30 to 60 minutes, 5 to 7 times a week.
- If there are days that you cannot take a long walk, take several short walks indoors to keep moving.
- **Stairs:** You do not need to avoid stairs if you can use them safely. Walking up and down stairs will help increase your strength. Follow your physical therapist's instructions for stair safety.

Questions? Please call your clinic or send a MyChart message to your provider if you have questions or concerns.