

Surgery Safety Checklist

Planning for your spine surgery

This handout gives steps to take when preparing for spine fusion and spine deformity surgery.

Why do I need a checklist?

The healthier and more prepared you are before surgery, the better results you are likely to have. Doing the items in this checklist should help your surgery be more successful.

To use this checklist, check off each item as you complete it. Circle any items you have questions about. Bring this list to your pre-surgery visit and review it with a member of your care team.

Think of this as your “pre-flight checklist” that will help your surgery and recovery go more smoothly.



Review this checklist with a member of your care team at your pre-surgery visit.

Your Habits

- Do 3 hours of aerobic exercise every week, as long as your primary care provider says it is safe for you.
- Do not smoke or use any products that contain nicotine for 3 months before and after your surgery.
- Do not use any prescription pain medicines stronger than hydrocodone (Vicodin) for 3 months before your surgery. If you have been using strong pain medicines, ask your primary care provider how to *taper* (start using less of) your medicine. You should be done taking any strong pain medicine at least 3 months before your surgery.
- For 3 months before surgery, limit how much alcohol you drink:
 - Women should have no more than 1 alcoholic drink a day
 - Men should have no more than 2 alcoholic drinks a day

Planning Ahead

For a while during your recovery, you will not be able to do all of your daily activities as you usually would. Plan now for your care and activities after surgery:

- Arrange for a responsible adult to take you home when you leave the hospital.
- Plan for your care after surgery. Who will be with you and care for you? Ask your surgeon how long you will need someone to stay with you while you recover.
- Some people find that they sleep best in a recliner for several weeks after surgery. Think about having a recliner in your home while you recover.
- Talk with your surgeon about activities after surgery. Find out how long you will not be able to drive, and what other limits you will have.
- If you may need to stay in a skilled nursing facility after surgery, tell your surgeon at least 2 weeks before your surgery day.
- Make sure you have a primary care provider who can answer your general health questions and manage any medicines that are not related to your surgery.
- Find out what you need to do during your recovery to help improve your back stability and strength.
- Set up your follow-up visits with your surgery team. These visits are often at 2 and 6 weeks after your surgery date.

Your Physical and Emotional Health

- Take good care of your teeth and gums:
 - Complete all dental work at least 2 weeks before your surgery.
 - Delay any non-urgent dental work for at least 3 months after your surgery.
- Check your entire body for any skin problems. If you are a woman, check the skin under your breasts. Any skin problems must be fully healed at least 2 weeks before your surgery.
- Make sure that any infections are fully healed and that you have finished taking all antibiotics at least 6 weeks before your surgery.
- If you have sleep apnea, anxiety, depression, diabetes, hypertension, heart conditions, or urinary tract problems, make sure these are in good control, and tell your surgeon about them at least 2 weeks before your surgery.

Talking with Your Care Team

- Talk with your surgery team about their experience with the surgery you are having. Ask about risks involved with your surgery, other treatment options, and what the results may be.
- Tell your care team if you know that any of these is true:
 - It has been hard to start an *intravenous* (IV) line for you
 - You have had any reactions to *anesthesia* (the drugs given to make you sleep during surgery)
 - It has been hard for an *anesthesiologist* (the doctor who manages your anesthesia during surgery) to create an airway for you
 - It has been hard to control your pain after other surgeries
- Tell your care team if you, a family member, or another blood relative has ever had a problem with anesthesia, and what the problem was.
- Tell your surgeon about any other health issues you have had, such as heart conditions, strokes, kidney disease, liver disease, lung disease, bleeding problems, complications after surgery, or seizures.
- Make a list of all allergies you have, especially allergies to antibiotics and latex. Give this list to your surgeon at your first visit.
- Make a list of all prescription and non-prescription (over-the-counter) medicines you take. Give this list to your surgeon at your first visit.
 - Anti-inflammatory and blood-thinning medicines such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, and others), warfarin (Coumadin), and clopidogrel (Plavix) increase your risk of bleeding. At least 6 weeks before your surgery, tell your surgeon if you are taking any drugs that affect blood clotting
 - Some over-the-counter supplements can also increase the risk of bleeding. Include all your supplements on the medicine list that you give to your surgeon.
- Find out about any legal issues that may be related to your spine problem, such as a Labor and Industries claim, or special insurance needs. Talk with your surgeon about these issues at your first visit.
- Talk with your health insurance company before your surgery. Find out what your policy will cover, and what you will need to pay for. This is very important, especially if you live outside Washington state.
- For women:
 - If there is any chance you could be pregnant, we advise you to have a pregnancy test before you come for surgery.
 - If you are pregnant, schedule *elective* (non-urgent) surgery after you have given birth.

Questions?

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

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., call the Bone and Joint Surgery Center at 206.598.4288.

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.598.6190 and ask for the orthopaedist on call to be paged.