

Taking Care of Yourself After Spinal Hardware Removal

Surgery Date: _____
Doctor: _____

This handout explains how to care for yourself when you go home. If you have any questions or concerns, talk to your nurse or doctor. Our staff is here to help you, please call the numbers at the end of this handout.

Activity

Be sure to walk. Set a time to walk at least 3-4 times each day. Let pain be your guide. If you are having pain, end the walk. You will walk 3-4 times everyday to help you get stronger. At first the walks may be somewhat short. The pain will lessen. As you get stronger, increase the distance you walk each day. You can climb stairs.

Limits

- **No driving while taking narcotic pain medicine.**
- **No lifting** more than 10 pounds (about 1 gallon of milk) for the first 3 weeks.
- **No sports** except walking until your first clinic visit.

Sex

After 2 weeks, you may resume sex, if comfortable.

Smoking

We strongly suggest you quit smoking. Avoid nicotine products, and second-hand smoke. Smoking will delay bone healing. It is best not to smoke for at least 4-6 months after surgery.

Sitting

You may sit for any length of time based on your comfort level. You should change your position every 60 minutes.

Bathing

You may shower 5 days after surgery.

Sleeping

Sleep in a position that is comfortable to you. You may sleep either on your side, stomach, or back. Use pillows for support. Place pillows under your legs when lying on your back. Place pillows behind your back and between your legs when lying on your side.

Pain

You may have more pain and numbness in the low back and legs as you heal. This is caused by swelling of tissue in your low back. To reduce the pain, there are many options to try.

- Ice the area for 15-20 minutes as often as needed. Do not put the ice directly on the skin. Use a pre-made ice pack or put ice in a plastic bag then wrap the ice pack or bag in a towel.
- Reduce your activity for the first 48 hours.
- Take the pain medicine as prescribed by your doctor.
- Do not take more than 3000 mg of acetaminophen (Tylenol®) per day. Percocet® and Vicodin® also contain Tylenol®. Do not take Tylenol® if you have liver disease without checking with your doctor first.

Compression Stockings (TEDS)

To improve blood flow and decrease the risk of getting a blood clot, you need to wear elastic stockings (TEDS) until you are walking 3 times a day. Remove the TEDS 2 times each day for one hour at a time. You should sleep with them on. You may wash the TEDS with soap and water. Let air dry.

Incision Care

Proper care of the incision helps to prevent infection.

- Keep the incision clean and dry.
- The incision is closed with sutures that dissolve under the skin. The incision is then given extra support with steri-strips (small pieces of tape) on the skin. The steri-strips will peel off as they get wet when you shower. You may gently remove them after 10 days.
- After 5 days, check the incision daily to be sure it is clean and dry. Change the dressing every other day or as needed
- After 5 days, check for redness, swelling, or drainage. Some redness and swelling are normal.
- If the incision is clean and without drainage, you may stop wearing the dressing after 5 days
- A small amount of clear or slightly blood tinged drainage from the incision is normal.
- **Do not wash directly over the incision.** Wash around the incision gently with soap and water and then let air dry.
- **Do not use any creams, lotions, ointments, or alcohol near or on the incision.**

Constipation

It is common to have constipation after surgery. It can be caused by the surgery, narcotic pain medicine, decreased activity level, and a change in your diet. Please see *Health Facts for You* #4843: Constipation from Opioids (Narcotics).

Return to Work

Your return to work will depend on your recovery and the type of work you do. Talk to your doctor before you return to work.

Refills

The Spine Clinic staff will work with you to balance pain medicine, pain management, and activity. If you need to refill your pain medicine, call the Spine Clinic at **(608) 265-3207**, Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and ask for the nurse. Please call when you have at least a **2 to 3 day supply left** of your medicines. Be ready to give the name and phone number of the drugstore where you want to pick up a refill.

Future Clinic Visits

The nursing staff will help you schedule your first clinic visit in 6 weeks. All other clinic visits will be as needed.

Who to Call

If you have questions or concerns, please call the Spine Clinic. Monday through Friday between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM at **(608) 265-3207**.

After hours, call the paging operator at: **(608) 262-0486**. Ask for the “orthopedic resident on call.” Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

The toll-free number is **1-800-323-8942**.

When to Call

- Increased pain, swelling or redness in or around the incision area.
- Sudden increase in pain or pain not relieved by medicine.
- Increased drainage, change in the color of drainage, or any odor from the incision. Be ready to describe what the drainage looks like, how it smells, and how much there is.
- A fever above 100.5°F or 38.1°C for 24 hours
- Problems urinating or having control of your bladder or bowel movements.
- A “new” chest pain or “new” problem with breathing.
- Redness, warmth or tenderness in the back of the calf of your leg(s).

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 9/2019. University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5127