

Home Care After Anterior Lumbar Interbody Fusion

Surgery Date: _____

Doctor: _____

This handout will review the care you need to follow once you are home. If you have any questions or concerns, please ask your nurse or doctor or call the numbers at the end of this handout.

Incision Care

- Proper care of the incision helps to prevent infection. If the incision is clean and without discharge, you may stop wearing the dressing after 5 days.
- Keep the incision clean and dry.
- The incision was closed with sutures under the skin and covered with Dermabond or steri-strips (small pieces of tape) on the skin. These will slowly peel off.
- Check the incision daily to be sure it is clean and dry, change the dressing every other day or as needed.
- Check for redness, swelling or drainage. Some redness and swelling is normal.
- A small amount of clear or slightly blood-tinged drainage from the incision is normal.
- **Do not wash right over the incision.** Wash around it gently with soap and water and air dry.
- **Do not use any creams, lotions, ointments, or alcohol near or on the incision.**

Activity Guidelines

Sitting: You can sit for any length of time based on your comfort level. You should change your position at least every 30-45 minutes. If you start to feel discomfort, change your position and activity.

Sleeping: You may sleep on your back, stomach, or side. You may also use pillows for support when lying on your side. Place pillows behind your back and between your legs. When you lie on your back, place pillows under your legs.

Walking: You should begin walking short distances 3-4 times a day. Slowly increase the distance. Let comfort be your guide. The goal is to walk at least a mile by your first follow up visit. You may walk anywhere your footing is safe. You may climb stairs.

Bathing: You may shower after 5 days. Avoid tub baths for the first 2 weeks. Avoid hot tubs, lakes, rivers, and pools for the first 4 weeks.

Driving: Do not drive for 2 weeks or while you take narcotic pain medicine.

Sex: After 2 weeks, you may resume sex when comfortable.

Restrictions: Do not lift more than 10 pounds (about 1 gallon of milk) for the first 6 weeks. Do not bend or twist at the waist, but you may squat with your knees. No sports other than the walking program until your first follow-up visit.

Return to Work

Your return to work will depend on how you are healing and the type of work you do. If you need to lift more than 10 lbs., bend and twist, you cannot return for 6-12 weeks. If you lift less than 10 lbs., and do not need to bend and twist, you could return to work in 2 weeks. You must discuss this with your doctor.

Future Visits

Your first post-op visit will be about 6 weeks after surgery.

Pain Control

Men may have scrotal swelling or bruising, this is normal. To help with this, apply a cold compress, and lie flat with legs elevated. If you still have abdominal pain for more than 24-48 hours, contact the Spine Clinic.

While you heal, you may notice some pain, numbness, tingling, or weakness in your back or legs. You may try the ice method or pain pills to manage your pain.

Ice Method: First, use ice and try to decrease your activity for 1-2 days. Ice the area for 20 minutes every hour for 4 hours in a row (best time is in the evening). Use a ready-made ice pack or put ice in a plastic bag and then wrap the bag in a towel. Do not put the ice right on your skin.

Pain Pills: Your pain will improve over time. As your pain improves, you will need less pain pills. Take all pain medicine with food and at least 8 ounces of water.

When to Call

- A fever above 100.5 F (38.1 C) for two readings taken four hours apart.
- Drainage from your incision.
- An increase in pain, redness, or swelling by your incision.
- Trouble urinating or controlling your bowel movements.

Who to Call

Spine Clinic Monday-Friday 8 am-5 pm: **(608) 265-3207** or Neurosurgery Clinic Monday-Friday 8 am-5 pm: **(608) 263-7501**.

After hours, these numbers will give you the paging operator. The toll-free number is: **1-800-323-8942**.

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 Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing HF#4957.