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POSTOPERATIVE INSTRUCTION FOR CERVICAL SPINE SURGERY

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. Our staff is here to help you. If you have questions after you are at home, please call the numbers listed at the end of this handout.

Activity

This is a major surgery and you need to give your body time to heal. Below is a list of instructions that you should follow until your first follow-up visit after surgery. You no longer need to wear the TED stocking (heavy white stockings) once you are home. • You may sleep either 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 on your back place pillows underneath your legs. • You may climb stairs, just try not to over-do. •

After your cervical spine surgery, please lie only on a bed. No sofas or recliners. Sit **ONLY** in a straight back chair (such as a dining room or kitchen chair or a structurally substantial chair such as a “Wing Back”.)

NO BENDING, STOOPING, PUSHING, LIFTING or STRAINING. Get up from a lying down position by turning first on one side or the other. **DO NOT PUSH BACKWARDS WITH YOUR HEAD & NECK** to adjust your position in bed. Turn on your side to do this. **LIFT ONLY WITH ONE ARM** at a time & **ONLY** a weight that you can easily manage.

For **MINIMALLY INVASIVE SURGERY** you may shower the 2nd morning after surgery. For **ALL OTHERS**, you may shower 4 days post-operative. The first day is the day **AFTER** surgery. Do not soak the incision. Do not disturb steri-strips. For surgical skin clips or sutures, you will be given instructions.

Begin walking in the house and progress to outdoors. Take someone with you the first few times. Slowly increase the distance each day so that you will be walking 1 mile/day by your 2nd post-operative week, 2 miles/day at 2 weeks post-operative. Hopefully by 2 months post-operative you will be walking 4 miles/day. If you feel soreness, reduce the distance and **REST**. These are **GUIDELINES, NOT RULES**.

Driving

After leaving the hospital you will be allowed in the car **TWICE, ONCE TO GO HOME, THE SECOND TO COME BACK TO THE OFFICE**. You will get your next set of instructions upon your return. For patients from out of state or country, there will be specific instructions. Otherwise no driving for 2 weeks, or while taking narcotic pain

medication. However, you may be a passenger.

Limitations

No lifting greater than 10 lbs (about 1 gallon of milk) for the first 5-6 weeks after surgery. No sports activity until your first follow-up visit other than the walking program. No sexual activity for 2 weeks.

If you question whether or not you can do something beyond the instructions given, it is safe to assume that the answer will be NO.

“LISTEN TO YOUR BODY “

Collar Management

Most patients will wear a collar when leaving the hospital. For those who have been fitted with one, keep it on at all times except for showering. You may wean yourself out of the collar after two weeks from your surgery. Specific instructions will be given to you.

First Postoperative Visit

Return to the office for your first visit approximately 10 -14 days after surgery. Call our office for an appointment (520-204-1495) or if you have questions or concerns. For GENERAL MEDICAL PROBLEMS CONTACT your personal physician.

Return to Work

Your return to work will depend on your recovery and the type of work you do. You must discuss this with your doctor before you return to work.

Pain management

For pain management, you will usually be given a prescription for a drug like Vicodin (hydrocodone) or Darvocet N100. For additional pain medication, try Extra strength Tylenol or similar agent. DO NOT USE ANY ASPIRIN or ASPIRIN containing medication. DO NOT use ADVIL or similar medication. These interfere with the clotting mechanism. You may take Celebrex if your general physician finds that it does not interfere with your OTHER MEDICATIONS.

You may have a “Duragesic” patch (a slow release narcotic) applied before you leave the hospital. Remove it on your 4th post-operative day. DO NOT TOUCH YOUR FACE until you wash your hands once you have touched the patch. If you have excessive nausea/vomiting in the first post-operative days REMOVE the patch. For additional pain medication, try Extra strength Tylenol or similar agent.

You may have an occasional increase in neck, arm pain and/or numbness after surgery during the healing phase. This is normal and is caused by inflammation (or swelling) of muscle and nerve tissue in your cervical spine. To reduce pain there are several approaches to decrease the pain you may be experiencing.

- Avoid sitting for more than 30-60 minutes at a time for the next 48 hours.
- Reduce your activity (i.e. walking) for the next 48 hours.
- Take the pain medicine as directed by your doctor. You can also take one extra strength acetaminophen

(Tylenol) every 4 hours between the prescription medicines, only as directed. Do not take more than 4000 mg of Tylenol in a 24 hour period. NOTE: Some narcotic pain medicines also have Tylenol in them. Do not take the anti-inflammatory drugs (i.e. Ibuprofen,

Motrin, Advil, Aleve, Celebrex, Aspirin) for 3 months following surgery.

Eventually you should no longer need to use pain medicine.

Incision Care

Caring for your Incision at home is important to prevent infection. Please follow these steps:

- Your incisions have been closed with absorbable suture material underneath the skin and small pieces of surgical tape (steri-strips) on the surface of the skin. In most cases these areas are covered with a dressing. You may remove the dressing 3-5 days after surgery.
- The steri-strips will gradually peel away with time as they get wet and this is normal. You may peel off the steri-strips anytime after 10 days.
- Take your temperature twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening for the first 7 days.

The wound will be checked and the dressing will be changed prior to discharge. Your dressing will be water occlusive and you may take a shower with it when you get home. However, do not take bath and do not soak the wound. The dressing typically will come off within 2 - 4 days at which time you may leave the wound open to air.

Do not be alarmed when you have bloody or serosanguineous drainage from the wound. This is normal and part of your postoperative recovery. However, call our office if you have persistent drainage for more than 3 days or a new onset of drainage sometime after 7 - 10 days from your surgery. You should also let us know if you are having any fevers (temperature over 101 F) or chills.

Be advised though that elevated temperatures after surgery can be normal and often is a result of poor lung ventilation. Taking deep breath, and ambulating as much as you can tolerate may help with this problem.

When to call your Doctor or Nurse

PAIN IS A RED FLAG TELLING YOU TO REST. Avoid taking pain relieving medication in anticipation that something you will do is going to cause pain.

- If you have a temperature above 101 degrees F (38.8 degrees C) for two readings four hours apart. If you develop a low grade fever, keep a chart of your temperature pattern at 8 AM, 12 noon, 4 & 8 PM. Bring the chart to the office at your next visit.
- Clear drainage from your incision, excessive, wound redness, swelling, purulent drainage or infection.
- An increase in pain, redness and/or swelling by your incision.
- Difficulty urinating or controlling your bowel movements.

When to call 911

- If you have difficulty breathing, have an irregular heartbeat, or chest pain.

Future follow-up visits

Your first post-op visit is usually scheduled along with your surgery. If you are unsure of your first postoperative appointment, please call (520) 204-1495 to make your first postoperative appointment at the Center for Advanced Spinal Surgery of Southern Arizona. This usually occurs 2 weeks after your surgical date. All other follow-up visits will be

directed by your physician.

Medications

If you need a prescription filled.

Because your health condition may change over time, your doctor or another provider who has access to your confidential medical records reviews refill requests. By following these simple guidelines, you will avoid any delay in getting your prescription refilled.

- Contact your pharmacy at least 5 days before your prescription requires refilling, To protect your health, pharmacies will accept refill orders only from your doctor. So, when you call The Center for Advanced Spinal Surgery of Southern Arizona with your request an additional step is added. Your prescription will be filled faster if you call your pharmacy directly, they will then contact The Center for Advanced Spinal Surgery of Southern Arizona.
- Use the same pharmacy, That way, your pharmacist will have your complete prescription records and you avoid the danger of mixing medications. To make it convenient for you, The Center for Advanced Spinal Surgery of Southern Arizona will work with the pharmacy of your choice. Please choose one pharmacy, and use only that pharmacy. It is an easy way to help protect your health.
- Call your pharmacy early in the day. This gives your doctor time to review your records. To ensure you get the right medications, we do not rush refills without making sure the order and your record are reviewed. Often, physicians are in surgery or finishing with patients late in the day, and we do not want to interrupt those patients' visits, therefore, refill requests received after 3 pm Monday through Thursday or after 10 am Friday will be reviewed and filled the next business day for The Center for Advanced Spinal Surgery of Southern Arizona.

If you run out of Medication before you request a Refill Always call your pharmacy at least 5 days before you run out of medication. This will give the pharmacy plenty of time to contact your doctor, for the doctor to review your record, and for the pharmacist to prepare your medication. All you have to do is watch your medication levels and there should be no reason for you to run out of medication. It is dangerous to “rush” an order, For your protection, refills are not done at night, over the weekend, on holidays or as an emergency if you have forgotten to call your pharmacy.

If you run out of your Medication early Your doctor ordered your prescription according to a precise dosage for a prescribed amount of days. If you run out early, it may mean you are experiencing some difficulty with your dosage or medication. Call The Center for Advanced Spinal Surgery of Southern Arizona immediately and explain your difficulty.

If your prescription is lost, misplaced or stolen:

To protect your health, lost or stolen prescriptions are replaced only with a physician visit. Stolen medication will require a police report to be completed and a copy of the report brought with to your visit. To avoid possible duplication of prescriptions when an order is lost or stolen, you will want to talk with your doctor. Call The Center for Advanced Spinal Surgery to schedule an appointment. Please call our office at (520) 204-1495 with any additional questions that may come during your postoperative recovery.