

Posterior Cervical Decompression and Fusion

Pre-Operative:

There are no specific preoperative exercises or preparation. Since the surgical approach is from the back of the neck, you may wish to have a haircut that includes a close trim on the back of the neck prior to surgery. This will facilitate us being able to shave this area during surgery and apply a post-operative bandage. Since there will be a bandage in place following surgery, please bring a loose-fitting shirt or a blouse to wear post-operatively.

Further instructions will be provided during the preoperative appointment.

Hospital Stay:

Most patients are discharged home 1-2 days following the surgical procedure. In some circumstances, you may stay a third night. The surgical procedure should take approximately 4 - 5 hours. Following surgery, there will be a bandage on the back of the neck. I do leave a small drainage tube in place, so that any bleeding that occurs overnight will be collected in the drain canister. This drainage tube will be removed before you discharge.

Post-Operative:

You will be given several different medicines to help control your pain. These medications are weaned over a 1-3 week period.

The bandage that you go home with should be kept on for 2 weeks. It is ok to shower as long as your bandage remains clean and dry. If it gets wet or saturated it may require changing. Please give us a call if this occurs.

You will be given a hard, cervical collar to wear for 4-6 weeks. Non-impact aerobic exercise such as walking can be initiated as soon as you feel comfortable. Heavy exercise, high impact activity, and heavy lifting (more than 20 pounds) should not be performed in the first 12 weeks, until after you see me in clinic for your third post-operative visit. I ask that you refrain from any repetitive impact activity such as using a lawnmower (ride or push), boats, motorcycle, skid steer, or any other activity that can produce repeated jarring motions for 3-4 months after surgery.

Follow Up:

You will be given a follow-up appointment for two weeks following surgery. At this visit, we will inspect your incision and remove the surgical sutures if present.

By this visit, I do expect that you will have weaned off of your post-operative narcotic pain medication. It is fine to use Tylenol at any point following surgery, provided there is no other medical reason that you should be avoiding it. Please do not take and NSAIDs (aleve, advil etc) as this can delay bone healing.

The second follow up appointment is in 6 weeks. We will again review your x-rays together to make sure nothing has changed.

The third follow up appointment will be in 12 weeks, after this visit you will likely no longer have any activity restrictions. I do ask that future follow-up appointments be kept at 6 months and 1 year following surgery for routine X-rays.

Constipation:

- To prevent constipation you should take the Colace 1 tablet twice a day (stool softener) until you have regular bowel movements, then can take once a day.
- You may also take over-the-counter Sennakot 1-2 tablets twice a day (gentle laxative)
- Take these medications until you have regular daily bowel movements, then decrease to once a day.
- You should hold these medications if you experience loose stool or diarrhea. It is also best to stay well hydrated to avoid constipation.

Smoking, Vaping, E-Cigarettes:

Failure of fusion is as high as 65% in smokers and nicotine users. Therefore, spine patients should not smoke or use nicotine for 6 months after surgery. This is your time to quit.

Do not smoke, as this interferes with bone healing. Smoking can also increase your risk of wound healing complications and infection. If you cannot quit – please refrain from smoking 1-2 months before and 6 months after your surgery.

CALL IMMEDIATELY IF YOU EXPERIENCE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Pain that is continually increasing or not relieved by pain medicine
- Any new weakness, numbness, tingling in your extremities
- Any signs of infection at the wound site: redness, swelling, tenderness, drainage
- Fever greater than or equal to 101° F
- Any change in your bowel or bladder function including inability to urinate or bowel or bladder accidents.
- New tenderness in your calf, redness or discoloration of the leg, new shortness of breath, coughing up blood, or chest pain. These may be signs of a blood clot.

Report to the local Emergency Department with chest pain, shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, or any other acute events.

You may not drive while taking pain medications and/or muscle relaxants.

Driving will be discussed at your first post operative appointment. Do not drive until cleared by your physician.