

# Posterior Cervical Decompression and Fusion

Patient post-operative instructions

## Typical hospital course

Usually 1 to 2 nights in the hospital, sometimes longer depending on pain control, drain output, walking, and medical needs.

## Key limits / reminders

Hard cervical collar for about 6-8 weeks in most patients. No heavy lifting or impact activity early. Avoid NSAIDs after fusion unless specifically cleared.

## Before surgery

- A short haircut or close trim on the back of the neck can make dressing care easier.
- Bring a loose-fitting shirt that will not rub the back of the neck.

## After surgery

- Neck and shoulder soreness is expected. Muscle pain can be significant during the first days to weeks.
- A drain is commonly used overnight and removed before discharge.

## Incision and showering

- Keep the incision and dressing clean and dry. Call if there is drainage, peeling, or saturation of the dressing.
- Do not soak in a tub, pool, or hot tub until cleared.

## Brace and activity

- Wear the hard cervical collar exactly as instructed, usually for the first 6-8 weeks. Remove it only if you were specifically told it is okay for showering or hygiene.
- Walking is encouraged right away. Avoid heavy lifting, forceful neck motion, impact activity, and strenuous exercise during early healing.

## Medications, driving, and work

- Pain medicine is usually tapered over 1 to 3 weeks.
- Tylenol is acceptable unless another doctor has told you not to take it.
- Do not take NSAIDs such as ibuprofen or naproxen after fusion unless your surgeon specifically says they are okay.
- Do not drive while taking opioid pain medication or muscle relaxers.

## Follow-up

- Typical follow-up is around 2 weeks, 6 weeks, 3 months, and sometimes later for x-rays and fusion checks.

## Constipation

- Opioid pain medication commonly causes constipation. Start a stool softener and/or gentle laxative if needed, drink fluids, and stop these medicines if you develop loose stools or diarrhea.
- If you go several days without a bowel movement despite over-the-counter treatment, call the office.

## Smoking / nicotine

- Do not smoke, vape, or use nicotine after fusion surgery. Nicotine can significantly interfere with bone healing and increase the risk of failed fusion.

## Call right away for

- Increasing pain that is not controlled with the prescribed medication plan.
- New or worsening weakness, numbness, tingling, loss of balance, or new trouble using your arms or legs.

- Redness, swelling, warmth, drainage, or a bad smell from the incision.
- Fever of 101 F or higher.
- Inability to urinate, loss of bowel or bladder control, or new saddle numbness.
- New calf pain or swelling, chest pain, coughing up blood, or shortness of breath.

*Questions or concerns: call the office. For chest pain, severe shortness of breath, or another emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department.*