

Open Lumbar Decompression Postoperative Instructions

Wound Care

- Keep incision area dry and clean. Do not put any ointments or antibiotic solutions on the incision. Let the steri-strips fall off by themselves. You should remove them after two weeks. If you notice **any drainage**, redness, swelling or increased pain at the incision site, call the office immediately. You may use an ice pack for 7 days after surgery to help with incisional discomfort as needed.
- You may shower immediately after your surgery, as long as 1) the incision is still protected with a waterproof dressing, and 2) you do not have a drain in place. Remove your dressing after 3 days. Do not take a bath or get into a pool for two weeks.
- For the best cosmetic result, keep your incision away from direct sunlight and tanning booths until it fades completely to flesh tone. Otherwise, there is a risk of permanent discoloration. You may use vitamin E lotion to massage the incision after 6 weeks.
- You may go home from the hospital with a drain. Please refer to the postoperative drain instruction sheet provided to you for any additional showering, incision, and drain care instructions.

Activities and Restrictions

- **While the incision is painful, no forward bending, lifting, or twisting.** Regular walking and stair climbing is permitted. Once the incision is no longer painful (usually 2 weeks), you may return to activities as tolerated (including office work, physically-demanding work, exercise, and sexual activity).
- Formal physical therapy will start around 3 weeks after surgery.
- You may resume driving when your judgement is not impaired by pain medication.
- Do not take any anti-inflammatory medication (e.g., ibuprofen, naproxen, aspirin) or blood thinning medication (e.g., Coumadin, Plavix, Lovenox, Fragmin) for 1 week before and 1 week after surgery. You may resume aspirin 1 week after surgery.

Long-Term Management

The key to success after a lumbar surgery is prevention of future episodes. The critical elements to good back health are:

- Strong core stabilizing muscles (back extensors, abdominals, gluteals)
- Hamstring flexibility
- Proper lifting technique (*how* you lift is much more important than *how much* you lift)
- Avoidance of a flexed or slumped low back (e.g., stooping over to pick something up)
- Weight loss (especially in patients with a large midsection)
- Regular aerobic exercise (30 minutes, 3x/week)

- Avoidance of tobacco products

Adherence to these principles will maximize your chances of avoiding future surgery. However, no one else can apply these concepts except the patient.

Questions and Emergencies

Call 815-398-9491 during business hours for questions and emergencies (Monday-Thursday 8 A.M. to 4 P.M., Friday 8 A.M. to noon). **Medication refills will only be authorized during business hours.** Please specify if you calling for an emergency and you will be connected with the spine nurse. All emergencies are reported to the physician immediately.

After business hours, you may call 815-398-9491 and the answering service will contact your physician. If he is out of town or if it is the weekend, another physician or physician's assistant will be available.