

Anterior Cervical Fusion 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 3-4 days after your surgery, as long as you do not have a drain in place. Remove your dressings after 7 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 will probably have pain or difficulty with swallowing for the first week after your surgery, particularly with bread and meat. Softer foods, smaller bites, and lots of liquids are helpful in the early phases of healing.
- **If you find that you are having extreme difficulty swallowing, along with voice changes, this may be serious and potentially life-threatening, so you should contact your doctor as soon as possible.**

Collar Instructions

- Wear your collar at all times (even when sleeping) for 6 weeks if given an Aspen collar or if given a soft collar it may be worn for comfort and as needed.
- You may remove the collar to bathe, shave, and eat, but do not move or stretch your neck with the collar off. You may drive without the collar in 1-2 weeks when you are no longer taking pain medication.
- If you experience skin irritation from the collar, you can apply talcum powder or a handkerchief inside the collar (do not apply on any open skin areas). Some neck and shoulder discomfort is common with daily collar usage. These aches and pains generally subside once the neck is solidly healed and the collar is discontinued.

Activities and Restrictions – at least 6 weeks after surgery

- Sleep upright in either a bed or recliner for the first 3 nights after surgery. Keeping your neck above your heart decreases throat swelling and improves swallowing. Some stiffness or ache in the back of your neck is normal immediately after neck surgery, but it usually improves quickly.
- Minimize neck movement; no forward or backward bending or twisting of the neck. Remember that the collar will not prevent all neck motion, and should serve to remind you not to move your neck. The less you move your neck after surgery, the more likely the bones will fuse successfully.
- You can walk as much as you wish. Stair climbing is permitted. No sporting activities until released by your doctor. You may engage in sexual activity when it is not painful. No lifting over 20 pounds.

- No driving motor vehicles when wearing a collar or taking strong narcotic pain medication. You may drive when you can comfortably turn your head to observe traffic and when your judgement is not impaired by pain medication.

Medications and Nutrition

- If possible, avoid dental procedures for 6 weeks after surgery.
- Do not take anti-inflammatory medication (e.g., ibuprofen, naproxen) for 1 week before and 6 weeks after surgery, unless specifically discussed with your surgeon.
- Do not take any 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.
- Do not take any osteoporosis medication (e.g., Fosamax, Actonel, Evista) for one month before and 3 months after surgery, unless specifically discussed with your surgeon.
- Do not take any oral rheumatoid arthritis medication (e.g., Arava, Imuran, Plaquenil, sulfasalazine) for 3 weeks before and 4 weeks after surgery, unless specifically discussed with your surgeon.
- Do not take any injectable rheumatoid arthritis medication (e.g., Enbrel, Humira, Orencia, Remicade, Rheumatrex) for one month before and one month after surgery, unless specifically discussed with your surgeon.
- Just a reminder: NO SMOKING. Tobacco smoke (even second-hand smoke) and nicotine (even gum, patches, or E-cigarettes) after fusion surgery will jeopardize the healing process, and may result in chronic pain and the need for further surgery.
- Take over-the-counter calcium (600 mg) with vitamin D (400 I.U.) three times daily with meals for 3 months following surgery. Increasing your protein intake also improves the rate of successful healing.

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.