

After Back Surgery: Tips for Daily Living

Going Home

The sooner you become active, the sooner you'll get back to your normal routine. At the same time, you need to protect your healing back. Increase your activity level at a slow but steady pace. You may also see a physical therapist during this time. Follow any guidelines your healthcare provider or physical therapist gives you.

Your first few weeks

You'll likely feel weak and tired at first, but you should feel a little stronger each day. Your incision may be sore. You may also feel some pain, tingling, or numbness in your back or legs. All of these symptoms should decrease as your nerves heal. Keep moving as much as you can without making your pain increase. Take your pain medicine as prescribed to keep the pain from becoming intolerable. Don't start smoking again.

Your walking program

Walking is the best exercise for you after back surgery. It strengthens your back and leg muscles, increases your endurance, and relieves stress. Start by walking around the house. Build up to several walks a day. You may find it helpful to set a goal. Talk to your healthcare provider or physical therapist about setting a safe, realistic goal for yourself.

Getting dressed

Putting on and taking off socks, slacks, and underwear may be easier to do lying on your back. A tool called a dressing reacher can be of help. To make dressing and undressing easier, wear loose clothes and slip-on shoes with closed backs. You may want to have someone help you dress and undress.

Getting ready to lie down

Before you lie down, make sure that you have the things you need within reach. Gather items such as medicines, eyeglasses, reading material, and other things you may want. Be sure to place them so you won't have to twist your back to reach them. If you aren't able to gather the items yourself, ask a family member or friend to help.

Washing at the sink

While standing at the sink, bend your knees and hips. Keep your back in a neutral position.

Showering

Use a handheld shower to wash your hair. Or bend at the knees and hips under the showerhead so you don't arch your back. To avoid bending, use a long-handled scrub brush. Use liquid soap so you don't need to pick up a dropped bar of soap.

Eating

Slide your chair as far under the table as possible. Don't lean forward or put your elbows on the table.

Using the toilet

Try using a toilet seat riser or portable commode. To get there, and elsewhere, use a walker to reduce the risk of falling. You can buy these at a drugstore or medical supply store. Some health insurance plans will reimburse these expenses if they're ordered by your healthcare provider.