

posterior lumbar/thoracic spine fusion

Home care instructions *P. Ronjon Paul, M.D., Nicholas Mataragas, M.D.*

Surgery Date _____

This information sheet has been written to give you and your family a general picture of what to expect and plan for with low-back surgery. You may have more questions about your treatment. If so, feel free to contact your surgeon or the Spine Center nurses.

pain management

The first day or two after surgery, your pain will be managed with IV (intravenous) pain medicine, in the form of an injection, or a Patient Controlled Analgesia Pump (PCA). The PCA pump allows you to control your own pain medicine. When you push a button, pain medicine is pumped through your IV line. Once you start to eat and drink, your pain medicine will be changed to pills.

activity in the hospital

The nursing staff will show you how to turn from side to side in bed, move to a comfortable sitting position, then stand and walk. You will probably be walking by the first day after surgery. You will need to wear a brace or corset when you are sitting, standing or walking. You do not need to wear it when you are lying down. You will wear a brace or corset for the first 6 weeks after surgery.

Patients having a fusion done due to a thoracic scoliosis or kyphosis may not need to wear a brace. This will be decided at the time of surgery.

leaving the hospital

Before you leave the hospital the nurse will review the instructions you will need at home. Before you leave the hospital you should have:

- Brace or corset.
- Pain medicine or a prescription for pain medicine.
- Dressings, if needed.

at home after surgery

Activity for the first 6 weeks after surgery

- Wear your brace when sitting, standing or walking.
- You may remove the brace when lying down.
- You may sleep with your brace off
- You may sleep either on your side, stomach or back. You may also use pillows for support behind your back and between your legs when you are lying on your side. When lying on your back, you may use pillows underneath your legs.
- You may shower 4 days after surgery. You should avoid tub baths for 4 weeks after surgery. Do not use a hot tub/swimming for 6 weeks. If you must shower sooner please keep the incision dry and covered with plastic medical tape. Change the dressing if it becomes wet.
- You no longer need to wear the compression stockings once you are up walking and back to your normal activities.
- You can sit for as long as you are comfortable, however, it is a good idea to change positions every 30-60 minutes.
- You can climb stairs just try not to over-do.
- You should begin a walking program as soon as you leave the hospital.

walking program

This is just a guideline

Day 1 Walk the length of the hallway at home 3-4 times in the morning and again in the afternoon or evening.

Days 2-6 Increase the distance walked by a small amount each day.

Day 7 Walk to the end of the driveway and back in the morning and again in the afternoon or evening.

Day 8 Walk a half block in the morning and again in the afternoon or evening.

Day 9 Walk 1 block in the morning and 1 1/2 blocks in the afternoon or evening.

Day 10 Walk 1 1/2 blocks in the morning and 1 1/2 blocks in the afternoon or evening.

After Day 10 Continue to increase the distance you walk as tolerated.

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limitations

- Do not drive for 2 weeks after surgery or while taking narcotic pain medicine. You may be a passenger. Patients who have extensive fusions such as for scoliosis may not drive. The Doctor will let you know when it is safe to start driving again.
- Do not bend forward at the waist.
- Do not lift more than 10 pounds (about 1 gallon of milk) for the first six weeks after surgery.
- No sports activities except the walking program.
- No sexual activity for 3 weeks.

return to work

Your return to work will depend on your recovery and the type of work you do. It is important to discuss this with your doctor.

pain management at home

You may have an occasional increase in low back, leg pain and/or numbness after surgery during the healing phase. This is normal and is caused by inflammation or swelling of tissue in your low back. There are several ways to decrease the pain you are having:

- Ice the area for 20 minutes every hour for 4 consecutive hours (especially in the evening). Do not put the ice directly on your skin. Use a ready-made ice pack or put ice in a plastic bag then wrap the ice pack or bag in a towel before you use it.
- Do not sit more than 15-30 minutes at a time for the next 48 hours.
- Take the pain medicine as directed by your doctor. You can also take one extra-strength acetaminophen (Tylenol) every 4 hours between doses of the prescription medicine. Only as needed. If you do wish to take one extra-strength Tylenol, between the prescribed pain medicine doses, you must keep track of how much you take in a 24 hour period. Due to effects on the liver, you should not exceed 4000 mg of acetaminophen in 24 hours.
- Do not take anti-inflammatory drugs for 3 months (aspirin, ibuprofen, Motrin, Advil, Aleve, Celebrex) after surgery. These medicines delay bone healing. 4-6 weeks after surgery, you should no longer need to use pain medicine. Narcotic pain medicine may cause constipation. Eat plenty of foods with roughage (bran, oats, fruit, raw vegetables, applesauce) and drink 6-8 (8 ounce) glasses of fluids (juices, water) a day to prevent constipation. You may also try a stool softener or Phillips MOM available over-the-counter.

incision care

Caring for your incision at home is important to prevent infection. Try to keep the incision as clean and dry as possible. Your incision has been closed with absorbable sutures under the skin and small pieces of tape (steri-strips) on top of the skin. The steri-strips will get wet when you shower. Allow them to peel off on their own. If you have a gauze dressing over your incision, you may remove it when you get home unless your doctor has told you to do something else. It is sometimes more comfortable to cover the incision with a dressing. If you would like to have a dressing over the incision, change it once a day. The dressing may be made of a piece of dry gauze taped in place. It is important to take your temperature twice a day for 10 days after surgery.

when to call the doctor or nurse

- A temperature greater than 101 degrees F (38.3 degrees C) on 2 readings taken 4 hours apart.
- An increase in pain, redness, swelling around your incision.
- Clear drainage from your incision.
- Pain behind the knee.
- Redness, warmth, and tenderness and swelling in the back of the calf of your leg(s).
- SOB
- Difficulty urinating or controlling your bowel movements.

future follow-up visits

1st Post-op visit: call 630 967 2225 to schedule your first post-operative appointment at the Spine Clinic if not already made. This usually occurs 2 weeks after the date of your surgery.

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medications

If you need a prescription filled:

Because your health condition may change over time, your doctor or another provider who has access to your confidential medical records reviews refill requests. By following these simple guidelines, you will avoid any delay in getting your prescription refilled:

- 1 Contact your pharmacy at least 5 days before your prescription requires refilling. To protect your health, pharmacies will accept refill orders only from your doctor. So, when you call DuPage Medical Group with your request an additional step is added. Your prescription will be filled faster if you call your pharmacy directly, they will then contact DuPage Medical Group.
- 2 ***Always use the same pharmacy.*** That way, your pharmacist will have your complete prescription records and you avoid the danger of mixing medications. To make it convenient for you, DuPage Medical Group will work with the pharmacy of your choice. Please choose one pharmacy, and use only that pharmacy. It is an easy way to help protect your health.
- 3 Call your pharmacy early in the day. This gives your doctor time to review your records. To ensure you get the right medications, we do not rush refills without making sure the order and your record are reviewed. Often, physicians are in surgery or finishing with patients late in the day, and we do not want to interrupt those patients' visits, therefore, refill requests received after 3 pm Monday through Thursday or after 10 am Friday will be reviewed and filled the next DuPage Medical Group business day.

If you run out of medication before you request a refill

Always call your pharmacy at least 5 days before you run out of medication. This will give the pharmacy plenty of time to contact your doctor, for the doctor to review your record, and for the pharmacist to prepare your medication. All you have to do is watch your medication levels and there should be no reason for you to run out of medication. It is dangerous to "rush" an order. For your protection, refills are not done at night, over the weekend, on holidays or as an emergency if you have forgotten to call your pharmacy.

If you run out of your medication early

Your doctor ordered your prescription according to a precise dosage for a prescribed amount of days. If you run out early, it may mean you are experiencing some difficulty with your dosage or medication. Call DuPage Medical Group immediately and explain your difficulty.

If your prescription is lost, misplaced or stolen:

To protect your health, lost or stolen prescriptions are replaced only with a physician visit. To avoid possible duplication of prescriptions when an order is lost or stolen, you will want to talk with your doctor. Call DuPage Medical Group to schedule an appointment.

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DuPage Medical Group Spine Center 630 967 2225