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## **DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS FOR CERVICAL FUSION**

This is an instruction sheet designed to assist you with any problems or questions you may have after discharge from the hospital. If you do not understand any of the following information or have any other questions please call our office.

**Follow-up Visits:** Your post-operative visits are scheduled for 2 weeks after surgery, then 2 months after surgery, 3 months after surgery, 6 months after surgery and then at a year post operatively. We will see you back yearly after the surgery to check your progress. You will schedule your first appointment at your pre-op visit. If you did not make your appointment please call the office to do so. Our office will not call you to make the appointment.

**Activities:** The first few months following surgery is a time for frequent rest periods. You may notice that you become tired after doing normal activities that previously would not have made you tired. This is completely normal. It is recommend that you start walking once you get home. Start gradually and do not expect yourself to be at a normal performance level. Gradually increase your walking to one mile a day by the end of the month. Physical therapy will be started at two months post-operative. Do not lift anything heavier than a gallon of milk until directed otherwise. As a general rule, lifting or reaching for objects below the level of the knees, or reaching for objects above the level of your shoulders are to be avoided.

**Tobacco:** The use of tobacco products is not permitted at any time; this includes cigarettes, dip, snuff, nicotine patches and cigars. Tobacco has been shown to decrease fusion rates by up to 50%. Nicotine use is to be discontinued for no less than 6 months after surgery.

**Anti-inflammatory:** The use of anti-inflammatory medications is not permitted; these medications will decrease your chance of a successful fusion. You will be able to resume these medications once directed by your physician. Usually after three months you may start back on an anti-inflammatory medication if needed. We do have vitamins available here at the office, which provide an anti-inflammatory affect. Please see the medication list given to you at pre-op if you are unsure if a medication is an anti-inflammatory.

**Wound Care:** If your incision is not draining blood or fluid onto your dressing when you arrive home, you may remove the dressing. You do not need to keep it covered if there is no drainage and the wound is clean and dry. If you have drainage longer than 4-5 days after surgery call our office. There are steri-strips across your incision, leave these on until you are seen at your first post-op visit. You may clean the wound with soap and water and pat dry. Start 5 days after surgery.

**Symptoms of Wound Infection:** Be sure to observe your wound daily for any signs of infection, i.e., increase in redness, swelling, and tenderness, drainage that has not resolved after the first 4-5 days or the presence of an odor. If you begin running a fever greater than 100.5 F, nausea, vomiting and just feeling bad can be signs of infection, call the office immediately.

**Showers:** You are allowed to shower, not bathe. When taking a shower after your surgery, cover your incision with a waterproof dressing. Once the incision is clean and dry with no drainage then you can go without the waterproof dressing. Clean the area with soap and water and pat dry. Do not remove the steri-strips that are across the incision. Avoid showering in hot water or bending over to pick up items, as this may cause you to become dizzy or lightheaded and risk falling. You can take a bath 3 weeks after surgery if the incision is healed and it has been discussed with your provider.

**Cervical Brace:** The lumbar brace is worn for a total of three

months. You must wear the brace when you are up for long walks or in the car. The brace does not need to be worn in the house or while sleeping unless otherwise instructed. The brace can be worn over your clothing or over a tee shirt.

**Bone Stimulator:** The stimulator is prescribed for patients that have more than one level of fusion, revision of fusion, use tobacco products or have diabetes. You will wear the bone stimulator for a total of three months. You must wear the stimulator 24 hours a day unless you are taking a shower or bath.

**Sexual activity:** Sexual activity is permitted to the comfort of the patient as a general rule. This is usually with you lying on your back as this will protect and support the back during these activities. Once again it is up to you on what is comfortable.

**Exercise:** At home, you may begin a walking exercise period, which is to be followed for the first two months. Progressively increasing walking each day until walking 1 mile a day by the end of the first month. You should continue this walking schedule as tolerated with the goal of increasing the distance until you are walking to approximately 2 ½ to 3 miles at a time. After your 4<sup>th</sup> month may do what activities you can tolerate.

**Travel:** For the first 1-2 weeks following surgery we would prefer you to not take long car trips. If you must take a trip you will need to stop every hour and take a stretch break.

**Scar Management:** There will be a scar after the surgery and everyone heals differently. If your wound is healed after two weeks you can start scar massage. This will help with modeling of the scar and provide improved flexibility and appearance. When applying scar massage, use light to moderate pressure to your comfort level. Make sure that you are sitting or lying down when performing. You can use lotion, Vitamin E oil, and Emu oil. These can be bought at a local pharmacy or grocery store.

When you massage the scar, gently start with two fingers and massage in line with the incision. This will help to de-sensitize the scar before using cross friction. Perform for 1-3 minutes and then take two fingers and massage against the scar up/down for 1-3 minutes. Perform 1-2 times daily. Paper tape across the scar has

shown to help decrease the tension for the wound margins and minimize the scar as well. We sell scar management, **Prosil**, here at the office for your convenience. Over the counter pharmaceutical items that decrease scar formation have been shown to improve scar healing. Please keep your scar covered while in the sun as UV exposure can cause the scar to stay permanently pink or discolored. It takes a full year for the scar to mature.

**Other Helpful Hints:** You would be amazed that something as simple as ice will help decrease swelling, spasms and pain. We have cold therapy available at the office that can be applied for as long as an hour without causing tissue damage or a burn to the skin. The pad can be placed in the refrigerator or freezer to charge the pad and then can be placed directly on the skin with the white side up. Insurance does not pay for this item, but you can purchase it if you would like. If you use ice then you should wrap in a moist towel and leave on no longer than 20 minutes. If left on longer than the 20 minutes it could damage the tissue causing a burn. You may repeat as often as needed. Some patients use cold therapy for months after the surgery.

A simple way to make your own ice pack is to use half water and half rubbing alcohol and place in zip lock bag and then place in the freezer. We recommend double bagging the zip lock to prevent leaking. If you receive an ice machine during your hospital stay, you can apply it as often as you like without breaks between. Please make sure that you do not put the ice machine pad directly on the skin, as it will burn.

Waterproof band-aids can be found at your local drug store.

If you have a sore throat try using lozenges, sore throat spray such as chloraseptic or try something cold.

A towel rolled up placed at the bottom of your pillow case where your neck rests, may give your cervical spine the support needed at night while asleep or at rest.

If you are having difficulty with swallowing try placing your chin to your chest. This will help open up your esophagus so you can swallow easier. It is not uncommon to have difficulty swallowing liquids compared to swallowing soft or solid foods. If you are unable

to swallow and find yourself drooling or constant cough with swallowing at any time contact our office immediately as this not normal.