

Planning for Cervical Disk Surgery



You can help make your surgery a success by preparing for it mentally and physically. This includes having realistic expectations about what surgery can do for you, and following your healthcare provider's instructions.

Plan ahead

Surgery can be stressful. But if you plan ahead, you can make your recovery easier. Talk to your surgeon about how much time you'll need to be away from work. Make sure family or friends can help you with meals, errands, and household chores for a few weeks after surgery. Make sure you arrange to have someone drive you home from the surgery and stay with you for a few days, especially if you live alone. Make sure that the prescriptions for post-operative medicines are filled by the time you get home.



Have realistic expectations

Cervical disk surgery can provide relief from neck and arm symptoms. But it may not eliminate your symptoms completely or at all. Before you have surgery, talk with your surgeon about what this procedure can and can't do for your problem and the potential risks.

If you need a bone graft

Depending on the type of surgery you have, you may need a bone graft. A graft is a piece of bone from your own body (autograft) or from a bone bank (allograft). If you need a bone graft, your surgeon will discuss these choices with you.

Fitting a brace

A neck brace can help protect your cervical spine while it's healing. A neck brace (cervical collar) isn't always needed. But if it is, your surgeon may recommend a rigid or soft cervical collar. The collar may be fitted before surgery or right after surgery. If you have to wear the cervical collar for any length of time, make sure that you don't get pressure sores. Have someone examine your chin, shoulder, and the back of your neck and back of your head every few days.

Before surgery

- Tell your surgeon all the medicines you take. This includes herbs, supplements, and over-the-counter medicines, such as ibuprofen or other NSAIDs (nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs). You may be told to stop certain medicines before surgery. If you are taking blood thinners, discuss this with your healthcare provider.
- Smoking and other nicotine products may slow bone healing. If you smoke, your surgeon may talk to you about stopping before surgery. Quitting smoking may significantly improve your results after surgery.
- Follow any directions you are given for not eating or drinking before surgery.

Risks and possible complications of cervical disk surgery

Your surgeon will discuss the risks and possible complications of surgery with you, which include:

- Soreness or trouble swallowing
- Persistent hoarseness
- Voice changes
- Side effects from anesthesia
- Failure of the graft to fuse
- Damage to nearby tissues
- Bone graft shifting or displacement
- Bleeding and possible need for transfusion
- Infection
- Spinal cord or nerve damage
- Fluid or blood collection, which may affect breathing
- Blood clot in a leg vein (deep vein thrombosis or DVT)

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