

Discharge Instructions for Cervical Fusion



You had a cervical fusion. During this procedure, your healthcare provider locked together (fused) some of the bones in the curve of your neck. This limits the movement of these bones. It also eases the pressure on your spinal cord, nerve roots, or both. It also helps ease pain and other symptoms, such as numbness and tingling. Here's what you need to know about home care after this surgery.

Activity

Do's and don'ts include:

- Arrange your household to keep the items you need within reach.
- Remove electrical cords, throw rugs, and anything else that may cause you to fall. If you have pets, confine or restrict them when you are walking so you don't accidentally trip over them.
- Follow your healthcare provider's instructions for wearing a cervical collar or brace. The neck collar or brace supports and correctly positions your neck after surgery. Follow instructions for its care and use, including how long you must wear it.
- Don't bend or twist at the waist, or raise your hands over your head for 2 weeks after your surgery. Use a long-handled "grabber" to pick up items from the floor without bending. You can also use an assistive device for pulling on your socks without bending. Your physical therapist can tell you where to get these.
- Don't drive until your healthcare provider says it's OK. This will most likely be when you can move your neck from side to side freely and without pain. Never drive while you are taking opioids or other pain medicines that may cause you to be drowsy.
- Walk as much as possible. You may also go up and down stairs. Walking outside or walking on a treadmill at a slow speed with no incline is OK. When using the treadmill, always hold on to the handrails and be certain to turn the machine off before stepping off of it.
- Don't lift anything heavier than 5 pounds.
- Ask your healthcare provider when you can go back to work.

Other home care

- Take your medicine exactly as directed. Talk with your healthcare provider about pain medicine.
- Don't take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as aspirin and ibuprofen, unless your healthcare provider says it's OK to do so. They may delay or block bone fusion.
- Follow your surgeon's instructions on when you can start showering. This is usually 24 to 48 hours after surgery. Then shower as needed. When you finish showering, gently pat dry the incision area. Don't rub the incision. Don't put creams or lotions on it.
- Use your neck collar as instructed by your surgeon.
- Don't soak in bathtubs, hot tubs, or swimming pools until told to by your healthcare provider.
- Your incision may have been closed using sutures (stitches), staples, or strips of tape. If you have sutures or staples, they may need to be removed 2 to 3 weeks after surgery. You can allow strips of tape to fall off on their own.
- If you smoke, quit. Nicotine slows healing of bone, and you may need more surgery. Join a stop-smoking program to improve your chances of success.

Follow-up

- Make a follow-up visit.
- Keep appointments for X-rays. They will be taken often to check on the cervical fusion.

Call 911

Call 911 right away if you have:

- Chest pain
- Shortness of breath
- Trouble controlling your bowels or bladder
- Calf that is painful, warm to the touch, and tender with pressure

When to call your healthcare provider

Call your healthcare provider right away if you have:

- Drainage, redness, or warmth at the incision
- Fever of 100.4° F (38°C) or higher, or as directed by your provider
- Shaking chills
- Weakness, tingling, or any new numbness in your arms or legs
- Pain gets worse
- Trouble swallowing
- Symptoms get worse or you have new symptoms

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