**Anterior Cervical Discectomy and Fusion – Post-Operative Instructions**

Successful surgery depends not only on the success of the procedure, but also on your cooperation and compliance during the post-operative period. The fusion (bone growth where the disc used to be) process can taken 6-12 months, maybe more.

As you resume your normal activities, you can expect to experience some discomfort/pain after surgery. It takes at least 8 weeks before you can expect to feel normal again – this includes, feelings of less energy that can last several months following surgery.

Below are instructions and guidelines to follow during your recovery period.

**Follow-up**

* You will have 3 routine follow-up visits - please call to schedule (**301.718.9611**)
  1. 2 weeks after surgery
  2. 3 months after surgery
  3. 1 year after surgery (you will need to have X-rays done before this visit)

**What To Expect**

* Dysphagia (“Difficulty Swallowing”) is the most common complaint after surgery. Patients feel a sensation of having a “lump in your throat” or a sore/scratchy throat. This is normal and resolves within a few weeks for most patients.
  + You may feel uncomfortable to swallow large bites of solid food. You should take small bites, chew well, and/or eat soft foods until this resolves.
* It is usual to experience some continued neck and/or arm pain - Pain should progressively improve and at no point should it be worse than before surgery
* Cramping and soreness is often associated with increasing activities too rapidly. If this is the case, restricting your activities for a day or two can help dramatically
* “Pins and needles” sensations are not uncommon after surgery but should subside over time, often this takes a few months
* Any weakness that was present before surgery can take up to 18-24 months to improve.

**Wound**

* You may remove your dressing 48 hours after surgery. Leave the steri-strips underneath in place; they will fall off in 7-10 days.
* The sutures are dissolvable - there is nothing that needs to be removed. If you see a small suture string, it will fall out within 2-3 weeks.
* You may shower once the dressing is removed – pat wound dry after showering.
* Do not swim or soak in water for 6 weeks.
* Do not put creams or ointments on the wound for at least 3 weeks.

**Pain Relief**

* We will provide you with prescription pain medication to help with your surgical pain. You should use these medications only as directed and only if needed.
  + As your incision heals, we would expect you to begin weaning from prescription medications. This should begin within 1-2 weeks of surgery
  + Constipation is a common side effect of pain medications. If you need to, you can take over the counter laxatives (Senokot, Milk of Magnesia, Dulcolax) as directed
* You will need to **AVOID**:
  + Anti-inflammatory medications (Ibuprofen, Aleve, Advil, Naproxen, Celebrex, Mobic…) for 1 week before and 3 months following surgery. Use of these medications could delay the healing of your fusion.
  + Blood thinners (Aspirin, Coumadin, Lovenox, Plavix) for 1 week prior to surgery. In most cases, you may restart those (at the doctor’s discretion) 4 days after surgery.

**Exercise/Activity**

* Depending on how many levels your surgery involves, you may be placed in a collar after surgery. This is to be worn any you are out of bed, for the next 6-8 weeks depending on the number of levels fused. If you are given a soft collar, it is your choice if you want to wear it.
* The best exercise is walking. Small amounts done frequently are best. Try to set a goal of one mile per day total. It is best to stay mobile.
* Repetitive activities using your arms may aggravate muscle spasms around your neck and upper back. Modify your activity with this in mind.
* Do not lift more than 10-15 lbs for the first 4 weeks after surgery.
* DO NOT SMOKE. This increases the chance that your bone will not heal properly.

**Driving**

* Our policy is to advise you against driving while using narcotic pain medications.
* If you are placed in a cervical collar, you will be restricted by the collar and it is not recommended you drive.

**Return to Work**

* You can return to work as tolerated within 1-2 weeks of surgery for light desk/phone type work
* If your job requires heavy physical activity, you will be unable to perform this type of work for at least 12 weeks (you will be cleared after your 2nd post-op visit)

**What to Watch For**

* Go to the nearest emergency room if you are having trouble breathing
* Please contact our office **(301.718.9611)** for any of the following:
  + Oral temperature greater than 100.5 ° F
  + Excessive redness, swelling, or drainage at the incision site
  + New, increasing pain/numbness/weakness in your arms/legs
* For general medical problems such as sore throat, cough, nasal drainage, etc., please contact your primary care physician.
* For medical emergencies, please call 911 or report to the nearest emergency room