**Anterior Cervical Discectomy and Arthroplasty – 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.

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 and the goal is to be off pain medications by 3-4 weeks post-op.
	+ 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 be prescribed a **muscle relaxant** to use as needed.
* You will be prescribed a **non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID)** – this can help to prevent bone growth at the surgery site
* You will need to **avoid**:
	+ Anti-inflammatory medications (ie Naproxen, Celebrex, Mobic, Ibuprofen, Aleve, Advil) for 1 week before and 1 week following surgery.
	+ Blood thinners (Aspirin, Coumadin, Lovenox, Plavix) for 1 week prior to surgery. In most cases, you may restart them (at the doctor’s discretion) 4 days after surgery or 4 days after drains are removed.

**Exercise/Activity – General Rule: IF IT HURTS, DON’T DO IT!**

* The best exercise is **walking**. It is best to stay mobile and it will help you recover faster.
	+ Please wait until your second follow-up to be cleared for more vigorous exercise
* Plan rest periods for each day.
* It is ok to sit and sleep in any comfortable position
* 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.

**Driving**

* Our policy is to advise you against driving while using narcotic pain medications.

**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**

* Please **call 911 immediately or go to the ER** if you developing any of the following:
	+ Difficulty breathing, shortness of breath, or pain when breathing
	+ Chest Pain
	+ Loss of bowel or bladder control
* Please contact our office (301.718.9611) for any of the following:
	+ Oral temperature greater than 101.5 ° F
	+ Excessive redness, swelling, or drainage at the incision site
	+ New or increasing pain/numbness/weakness in your arms or legs
* For general medical problems such as sore throat, cough, nasal drainage, etc., please contact your primary care physician. You should also contact your primary care physician regarding in questions about your routine medications not prescribed by this office.
* For medical emergencies, please call 911 or report to the nearest emergency room