

**SAN RAMON SURGERY CENTER  
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**Home Care  
for Spinal Surgery Patients**

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**Caring for yourself at home.**

There are many things you need to know for your safety, your speedy recovery, and your comfort.

**Control Your Discomfort.**

- Avoid sitting for more than 20-30 minutes. Prolonged sitting increases the pressure on your lower back.
- Take your pain medication at least 30 minutes before doing your exercises or walking.
- Slowly wean yourself from prescription medication to Tylenol. You may take two, extra-strength Tylenol instead of your prescription medication up to four times daily. (Not to exceed 4000mg/day)
- Change your position every hour throughout the day.
- Use ice for pain control. Applying ice to your affected area will decrease discomfort. Do not use ice for more than 20 minutes at a time each hour. You can use it before and after your exercise program. A bag of peas wrapped in a kitchen towel makes an ideal ice pack. Mark the bag of peas and return them to the freezer (to be used as an ice pack later).

**Body Changes**

- Your appetite may be poor. Drink plenty of fluids to keep from getting dehydrated. Your desire for solid food will return.
- You may have difficulty sleeping. This is normal. Don't sleep or nap too much during the day.
- Your energy level will be decreased for the first month.
- Pain medication that contains narcotics may cause constipation. Use stool softeners or laxatives such as milk of magnesia if needed.

**Stockings**

You will be asked to wear special white stockings, called TED hose. These stockings are used to help squeeze the veins in your legs. This helps to keep swelling down. It also reduces the chance for blood clots.

- If swelling in the leg is a problem, raise the leg for short periods during the day. It is best to lie down and raise the leg above your heart.
- Remove stockings for 1-2 hours, two times a day. Otherwise, wear the stockings all the time.
- Call your doctor if you notice increased pain or swelling in either leg.
- Ask your doctor when you can stop wearing stockings. Usually, this will be done three weeks after surgery.
- Take your temperature if you feel warm or sick. Call your surgeon if it exceeds 101°F.

**Exercise**

Walking is the best exercise you can do. This will build up strength and endurance. Your doctors want you to walk at least a mile each day by two weeks after surgery. They will ask you about this at the post-operative visits.

**Caring For Your Incision**

- Keep your incision dry for 3 days.
- If you have staples securing your incision, keep your incision covered with a light, dry dressing until your staples are removed, usually 10-14 days.
- You may shower three to four days after surgery, unless instructed otherwise. If you have staples, cover your incision with a clear dressing to protect it. After showering, apply a dry dressing.
- Notify your surgeon if there is increased drainage, redness, pain, odor or heat around the incision.

**Dressing Change Procedure**

1. Wash hands
2. Open dressing change materials
3. Remove old dressing
4. Inspect incision for the following and call surgeon if noted:
  - a. Increased redness
  - b. Yellow/green drainage
  - c. Odor
  - d. Surrounding skin is hot to touch
5. Pick up dressing. Be careful not to touch inside of dressing where it will touch the wound.
6. Lay over the incision starting in the center of incision.
7. Tape dressing in place.

## Recognizing & Preventing Complications

### INFECTIONS

#### Signs of Infection

- Increased swelling, redness or warmth at the incision site
- Change in color, amount, and odor of drainage
- Increased pain in spine
- Fever greater than 101°F.

#### Prevention of Infection

- Take care of your incision as explained
- Take proper care of yourself by alternating rest and activity.
- Drink plenty of fluids such as water.
- Eat a nutritious diet.

### BLOOD CLOTS IN LEGS

Surgery may cause the blood to slow and thicken in the veins of your legs, creating a blood clot. If a clot occurs, you may need to be admitted to the hospital for IV blood thinners. Early treatment usually prevents the more serious complication of pulmonary (Lung) embolus.

#### Signs of Blood Clots in Legs

- Swelling in thigh, calf or ankle that does not go down with elevation.
- Pain, tenderness in calf
- NOTE: blood clots can form in either leg.

#### Prevention of blood clots

- Foot ankle pumps
- Walking
- Compression stockings

### PULMONARY EMBOLUS

An unrecognized blood clot could break away from the vein and travel to the lungs. This is an emergency and you should call 911 if suspected.

#### Signs of a Pulmonary Embolus

- Sudden chest pain
- Difficulty and/or rapid breathing
- Shortness of breath
- Sweating
- Confusion

#### Prevention of Pulmonary Embolus

Prevent blood clots in legs

Recognize a blood clot and call physician quickly

### POSTOPERATIVE EXERCISES AND GOALS

#### ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

Exercising is important for the best results from spine surgery. You may receive exercises from a physical therapist at an outpatient facility or at home. In either case you need to participate in an ongoing home exercise program once the surgeon has advanced your activity. After each therapy session ask your therapist to mark in your notebook the right exercises for you. It will be customized to fit each patient. Exercising is vital to your recovery and to maintaining a healthy back. When performed correctly, exercise can decrease inflammation and speed the recovery process by increasing nutrients to the affected area.

**NOTE:** All exercise should be performed slowly and controlled, within limits of comfort. If an exercise causes an increase in pain, discontinue the exercise and consult your therapist or physician. Each patient will progress at his or her own rate. Try not to compare yourself with other patients.

#### DO'S AND DON'TS

All spine patients need to have a regular exercise program. This is to maintain their fitness and the health of the muscles. With permission from your doctors, you should be on a regular exercise program. The program should be three to four times per week. It should last 20-30 minutes. Impact activities such as running and singles tennis may put too much load on the spine. They are not recommended. High-risk activities such as downhill skiing are likewise discouraged. Infections are always a potential problem. You may need antibiotics for prevention.

## **What to do in general**

- Take antibiotics one hour before having dental work or other invasive procedures for two years after surgery.
- Although the risks are very low for post-op infections, it is important to realize there is a risk. Spine instrumentation hardware could possibly attract bacteria from an infection located in another part of your body. If you should develop a fever of more than 101°F, call your doctor. If you should have an injury such as a deep cut or puncture wound, you should call your doctor. You should clean it as best you can. Put a sterile dressing or Band-aid over it. The closer the injury is to your instrumentation, the bigger the concern. Occasionally, antibiotics may be needed. Surface scratches may be treated with topical antibiotic ointment. Notify your doctor if the area is painful or reddened.
- When traveling, stop and change positions hourly. This prevents your joints from tightening.
- See your doctor yearly unless otherwise recommended.

## **What to Do for exercise**

### **Choose a Low Impact Activity**

- Recommended exercise classes
- Home program as outlined in Notebook
- Regular one to three mile walks
- Home treadmill
- Stationary bike
- Regular exercise at a fitness center
- Low impact sports-golf, bowling, walking, gardening, dancing, etc.

### **What Not to Do**

- Do not run or engage in high impact activities
- Do not participate in high-risk activities such as downhill skiing, etc.
- Avoid step stools and ladders.