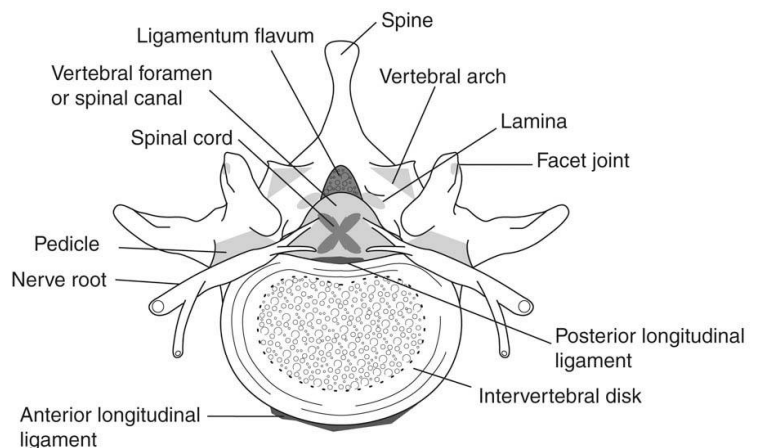


How to Care for Yourself after Posterior Cervical Spinal Fusion

What is Posterior Cervical Spinal Fusion?

Posterior cervical spinal fusion is fixing the bones in your neck together to steady it or prevent movement. The surgeon removes the back portion of the spine called the lamina, in order to open up the area for your spinal cord and nerves. Screws are then placed into the bones of the neck from behind and connected together with a rod along each side. The pressure on the spinal cord and/or nerves is relieved by taking out any disc or bony material that might be pushing on them before the neck is fused together.



Structures of the Spine

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How long will I Stay at the Hospital?

Most patients stay in the hospital for 1-3 days. Before you can go home, you need to be able to:

1. Control your pain by taking oral pain medications
2. Get up and walk around on your own
3. Empty your bladder.

If you are unable to do these activities or if you have any problems from your surgery, you may need to stay in the hospital longer.

How Should I Wear the Collar?

If we sent you home with a collar to wear around your neck please make sure that you wear it according to instructions.

- Make sure that the collar fits snug. It should not be so tight that it hurts or causes your skin to break down.
- Someone should check your skin daily after your shower to see that your skin is not injured because of rubbing.
- Sometimes using a piece of silk, or flannel between you and the collar can add some comfort and make it easier to keep the collar clean.
- If we instructed you to wear the collar at all times, even with showering, please make sure that you have extra pads to use in the shower.
- If your skin does begin to break down, please call and let us know as soon as possible.

Which Activities Should I Avoid?

- Do not bend or twist your neck repeatedly.
- Do not lift more than 5-10 pounds (about the weight of a gallon of milk).
- If you go to pick something up and it causes strain to the neck muscles, do not lift it.
- Do not do any heavy pushing or pulling with your arms.
- Do not drive for at least two weeks after surgery. After the two weeks do not drive if you are still in a hard collar, or if you are taking prescription pain medications or a muscle relaxer. These medications can cause you to be drowsy. Once you are able to drive, make sure that you can safely look over your shoulders without causing any pain.
- When riding in a car, have the headrest up to give your head/neck support while riding.
- Do not do any weight-lifting, sweeping/mopping, shoveling or raking.
- You may have sexual activity when you are comfortable with it.

Follow these limitations until your follow up appointment in 4-6 weeks.

How Can I Take Care of Myself at Home?

Please remember that it takes time for your neck and nerves to heal. You may have complete relief of your pain immediately after your surgery, but this is not normal. Allow yourself time to heal and do not do activities that may irritate your neck.

Activity

You should walk around your house at least once every 1 ½ to 2 hours while you are awake, to keep your muscles strong and to help prevent blood clots in your legs.

- Once you are comfortable with walking, you can gradually increase the amount or length of time that you do walk.
- Do not push yourself to do too much too soon.
- If you have a collar, make sure that you can safely see where you are walking so that you do not trip or fall.

If you do any activity that increases your pain, stop it immediately.

Ice

If you have a lot of discomfort to the back of your neck, you can use ice to help.

- Place a towel over the surgical site to protect your skin, and then use a gel pack for 30 minutes. You may repeat this about 4 times per day.
- Do not leave the pack on longer than 30 minutes because it may actually increase your pain. A gel pack can be made by placing liquid dish soap in a freezer Ziploc® bag until it is ½ to 2/3's full. Place the bag flat on a freezer shelf to allow it to harden. It will form a gel that will conform to your body. The gel pack can be refrozen after you use it.

- Make sure to ice for 30 minutes prior to getting your staples out

Washing/wound care:

It is important that you wash your surgical wounds at least once per day with soap and water, and pat it dry afterward.

- Do not be afraid of hurting the wound because of the soap and water.
- Do not go in bath tubs, lakes, pools, or hot tubs until wound is completely healed.
- Do not keep the wound covered unless you have some drainage, and we instructed to do so.
- If you are wearing a hard collar, you will need help to wash the wound, and make sure that it is not infected.

Which Other Signs and Symptoms I May Have?

Constipation:

Decreased activity after surgery, along with your pain medications, may result in constipation. It is important that you move your bowels regularly. Fruits, bran cereal, extra fluids or over the counter laxatives such as Miralax® or Milk of Magnesia® will help you to move your bowels regularly

Difficulty swallowing:

It is not unusual to have some difficulty swallowing food after a surgery that is done through the front of your neck. This usually goes away within the first 6-12 weeks after the surgery, and usually doesn't cause many difficulties.

Make sure that you cut your food into small pieces and chew them well before you try to swallow. If this does not help, or if you develop trouble swallowing liquids it is important that you call our office to let us know as soon as possible.

When should I call my doctor?

Contact our office at the appropriate number listed below if you have any of the following signs and symptoms:

- Increasing redness or swelling around your incision with or without any soreness or if the edges of your incision start coming apart.
- Drainage from your incision, especially if yellow/green and/or bad smelling.
- Fever over 101 F.
- Increase or sudden bruising around the incision that wasn't there before,
- Increasing pain that you cannot control.
- Any new numbness or tingling in your hands or fingers on either side.
- New weakness of your arm, hand or legs.

Phone lists of physician's administrative assistants:

Dr. Frank La Marca- (734) 936-5024

Dr. Paul Park- (734) 615-2627

Dr. Juan Valdivia- (734) 936-5024

Dr. Steve Sullivan- (734) 936-5020

Dr. Lynda Yang- (734) 936-5017

Please call the above numbers and leave a message for any questions and prescription refills. Please call before 3:00pm in order for your questions to be answered. If you call after that time, your call may not be returned until the following business day.

If you have paperwork that needs to be filled out for disability, please allow at least 1 week for this to be done. We need a release of information from you in order to complete paperwork related to work or school. If we do not have a release of information, we cannot send the paperwork to your employer.

Prescription Refills:

To refill a prescription that we have given you, call the number listed above for your doctor. **Please allow 48 hours for your prescription to be filled.**

Some medications (containing oxycodone or morphine) cannot be called in to a pharmacy. We can either fax over these prescriptions, or you may pick them up at our office. Please allow 4-7 days for the mail. We only provide pain medications for 3 months from the date of your surgery. If you need further pain medications after that time, contact your primary care doctor or your pain specialists.

Taking Medication Safely:

Follow the dosing of your prescriptions carefully and do not take more medication than what your doctor ordered. Not following the dosing instruction can result in harm to your liver, kidneys, respiratory problems or overdose.

- Do not take any over the counter pain medications that contain acetaminophen (Tylenol®) with your prescriptions unless we otherwise instruct you to do so.
- You cannot take any prescription or over-the-counter medications such as, Advil®, Aleve®, Celebrex®, Mobic®, Relafen®, naproxen, ibuprofen or aspirin products, until cleared by us, because it can prevent your fusion from occurring.

Disclaimer: This document is for informational purposes only and is not intended to take the place of the care and attention of your personal physician or other professional medical services. Talk with your doctor if you have Questions about individual health concerns or specific treatment options.

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