

Going Home After Your Spinal Fusion Surgery

You are about to go home after your spine surgery. You and your family will find these instructions helpful when preparing for your recovery. You will find that every day gets a little better and before long you will feel more like yourself.

How will I care for my incision?

You will go home with a bandage covering the spine incision. Your nurse will let you know which of the following plans you will need to follow at home:

- ☐ Remove the bandage when you are 5 days out from surgery and leave it off.

If the bandage becomes wet or soiled sooner, you should change it. To replace the bandage, remove the old one and replace it with a clean dressing, folding a 4X4 gauze pad in half, with a little bit of tape to hold it in place. Do not use any ointments or cleaners on the incision. Leave the steri-strips in place until they begin to loosen and come off.

- ☐ Leave the bandage in place until you return for your first follow-up appointment. If the bandage is coming off, you can change it following the instructions above.

Be sure to call your doctor's office if there is drainage from the wound or if the incision is getting red and more tender.

How will I bathe?

- ☐ If you were told to leave the bandage on for 2 weeks until you come back for a visit, you can shower after 3 days. The bandage is waterproof and you can shower right over it.

- ❑ If you were told to take the bandage off after 5 days, you can shower then as long as the incision is closed and there is no wound drainage. Before that time, you will need to sponge bathe. You can wash your hair in the sink until you are able to get into the shower.

Do I have any restrictions on my activity?

- Do not do any activity more strenuous than walking until you get clearance from your doctor.
- Avoid bending over at the waist or twisting your spine.
- Do not lift any more than 5-10 pounds which is about the weight of a gallon jug of milk. Be careful not to lift pets or young children.

We want you to be up and walking throughout your house. You will find that each day you will have more energy and less pain and you will be able to tolerate more and more walking. If you are doing well, you can go outside for a walk. In the beginning you will need to take a few rest periods throughout the day to lie down. Your family will help you decide when you are comfortable enough and have enough energy to make an outing away from home.

What should I eat while recovering from surgery?

When you go home you can return to your normal diet.

- Drink plenty of fluids and eat fruits and high fiber foods, like bran cereals or muffins to help keep your bowels moving. Eating smaller more frequent meals may be best to start out with if your appetite has not returned to normal.
- Make sure you have some food in your stomach before taking your pain medications.
- Your body needs extra calories and protein for the first six weeks after surgery to heal. Look on page 9 to find ideas of foods to add to your diet if you are not eating well, to be sure you get good nutrition.

What if I get constipated?

It is very common for people to become constipated while on pain medications.

- Take a stool softener like **Colace®** every day until off the narcotic pain medications.
- If eating high fiber foods is not enough to keep your bowels regular, you may need added help to get you going. **Miralax®** or **Senna®** can be helpful. You can buy them over the counter at your local grocery store or pharmacy. Just follow the dosing directions on the package.
- When you have stopped the pain meds and your bowels have returned to normal, you can stop taking these medications.

When will I be able to return to school?

Most kids need to recover at home for 3 to 4 weeks before returning to school.

Most schools can provide a homebound teacher to help you keep up with assignments. School will take a lot of energy in the beginning. Many kids find that the easiest way to transition back to school is to go for a few partial days at first, then advance to full days.

- You will have to stay out of gym and sports for the next few months, until your doctor gives you permission to participate.

You will need to remember your lifting restrictions in school. Your backpack probably weighs more than 10 pounds. Find out if it is possible to get 2 sets of books so you can keep one set at home and don't have to carry as much in your back pack. Another option is to use a bag on wheels or to have a friend carry your books for you. Let us know if you need any notes for school to make the transition easier.

When can I drive again?

We usually restrict driving for 4-6 weeks. You must be completely off of any narcotic medications and fully able to turn your head to look over your shoulder without pain, to safely operate the car.

When should I call my doctor's office?

You can always call if you have a question or problem related to the surgery or if the pain is not controlled by the pain medication.

Be sure to call if there are any signs of infection such as:

- fever over 101 degrees Fahrenheit
- wound drainage
- redness and more pain around the incision

Be sure to call if there are any signs of neurological changes such as:

- changes in sensation in your legs
- a new weakness, numbness or tingling in your legs
- losing control of your bladder or bowels

What kind of pain treatment will I have at home?

You will need to continue treating your pain at home with medications and other comfort measures. Over the next 2-3 weeks, your pain will decrease and you will need less pain medication. Here are some helpful suggestions to help you manage your pain.

- For the first 2-3 days at home, take your medicine on a regular schedule, like you did in the hospital. The amount of pain changes over the first week after surgery.

The amount of pain should be checked often by your caregivers so that you will get the right amount of medicine for your pain.

What kind of medications will I take?

Medicine	What to Expect	When to Take
Opioids Pain medicines like oxycodone are used for severe pain.	These medicines will make you sleepy and also constipated. They can also slow down your breathing, make you dizzy and can cause nausea.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every 4-6 hours all day to provide steady pain relief. • For the first few days you may want to wake up during the night to take your opioid so you do not wake up in severe pain.
Tylenol® A pain medicine that helps with mild to moderate pain. It can also be taken at the same time as the opioids to boost your pain relief.	There is a maximum amount that you can take each day. Doses that are too high can harm your liver.	Every 6 hours all day to provide steady pain relief. It can also be taken at the same time as the opioids to boost your pain relief.
Ibuprofen An anti-inflammatory and will help with mild to moderate pain caused by inflammation after surgery.		Every 6 hours around the clock to provide steady pain relief.
Valium Used to decrease your muscle spasms.	This medication can make you very sleepy and can make you dizzy.	Just when you are having muscle spasms.

What should I do if the pain medicines are not working and the pain is getting worse?

If you are taking the full amount of your pain medication and nothing is working, you need to call your doctor's office. You can also try other comfort measures such as changing your position, stretching and massage.

When and how do I decrease these medications?

- If you're too sleepy or too dizzy, decrease the opioids and valium you take by spreading the time in between doses or decreasing the number of tablets you take at a time.
- Stop your Valium if you are not having muscle spasms.

After 2-3 days at home:

Start decreasing your opioids after 2-3 days at home because at this point the pain from surgery is usually less.

- First, spread the time between opioids from 4 to 6 hours or from 6 to 8 hours.
- Change from taking the opioids around the clock to 3 times a day when you need them, such as in the morning, before activities and at bedtime. The next step is taking them once or twice a day.
- You should continue to take the Tylenol® and Ibuprofen around the clock day and night to help with pain relief.
- If your pain level is low and you are comfortable with only Tylenol® and Ibuprofen, you can stop your opioids.
- You can stop the Tylenol® and Ibuprofen last, when you do not have any pain.

Will I get addicted to the opioid medications?

You will not get addicted to your opioids. If you take opioids for a long time your body becomes dependent on the drug. If the opioid is cut down or stopped too quickly, you could have symptoms of opioid withdrawal. These are sweating, chills, headache, and nausea.

How do I keep track of my medicines?

Sometimes it is hard to remember the times and the amounts of medication you've taken. A simple chart can be helpful to record your pain levels and the medication and is available on page 8.

What other things can I do to help with my pain?

Many non-drug therapies can help you relax and decrease your pain. Remember to use the ones that work for you:

- deep breathing
- listening to music
- massage
- watching television
- having friends visit
- drinking a milk shake
- using a warm blanket

Pain Medication Chart

Date	Pain medication and amount	Time

Calorie-Protein Boosters

Powdered milk (33 calories/teaspoon, 3 grams protein/teaspoon)

Add 2-4 tablespoons to 1 cup milk. Mix into puddings, potatoes, soups, ground meats, vegetables, cooked cereal)

Evaporated milk (25 calories, 1 gram protein/teaspoon)

Use in place of whole milk, in desserts, baked goods, meat dishes and cooked cereals.

Sweetened condensed milk (60calories, 1 grams protein/teaspoon)

Add to pies, puddings, and milkshakes. Mix 1-2 teaspoon. with peanut butter and spread on toast.

Peanut butter (95 calories, 4 grams protein/teaspoon)

Serve on toast, crackers, bananas, apples, celery, carrot, etc.

Egg (80calories, 7 grams protein/egg)

Add to casseroles, meatloaf, mashed potatoes, cooked cereal, macaroni and cheese.

Add extra to pancake batter and French toast (Do not use raw eggs in uncooked items).

Butter or margarine (45 calories/teaspoon)

Add to pudding, casseroles, sandwiches, vegetables, cooked cereal.

Cheese (100 calories, 7 grams protein/ounce)

Give as snacks, or in sandwiches. Add melted to casseroles, potatoes, vegetables, soup.

Wheat germ (25calories/teaspoon)

Add a tablespoon or two to cereal. Mix into meat dishes, cookie batter, casseroles.

Mayonnaise or Salad Dressing (45 calories/teaspoon)

Use liberally on sandwiches, on salads, as a dip for raw vegetables or sauce on cooked vegetables.

Sour cream (26calories/teaspoon)

Add to potatoes, casseroles, dips; use in sauces, baked goods.

Carnation Instant Breakfast (130calories ,7 grams/packet)

Add to milk or a milkshake.

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