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Lifespan Physician Group, Inc.
Neurosurgery
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Discharge Instructions for Patients after Lumbar Fusion

Success of the Surgery

A successful result after the surgery depends on a positive attitude and efforts by the patient to aid recovery. Your preoperative symptoms may take weeks or longer to improve fully. Generally, symptoms such as pain shooting into the leg improves first, followed by motor weakness, if any. Numbness is often the last symptom to improve. Pain in the back itself may be due to many factors and may improve slowly or persist to some degree. Even if your leg pain is better immediately after the surgery, you may have flashes of pain when you start to become more active.

Activity

Unless you have been instructed otherwise, you should focus on gentle walking the first two weeks after the surgery. You should start with brief walks in the house, and gradually increase the time and speed of your walks. It is best to limit stair walking to one or two times a day for the first week. As you feel better, you should start to take longer walks outside, including walking up inclines. You should avoid driving or being in the car for the first two weeks. After that, start with short drives with another person in the car. You should also avoid lifting anything heavier than a half-gallon of milk for the first two weeks. You may then start to lift light objects if you are comfortable. Please remember, if it hurts, do not do it! Sexual activity can be resumed when you feel comfortable.

You can discuss returning to an exercise regimen with your physical therapist.

Care of Your Incision

Slight drainage the first day or so, limited swelling, or mild bruising is common and usually not of concern. If there is significant leaking, marked redness, or a large amount of swelling you should call the office.

If your incision was closed with staples or stitches, you should keep your incision clean and dry for three days. You may then remove the dressing and shower. Pat the incision dry gently and apply a new dry dressing. Staples are usually removed in the office about 10-12 days after the surgery. You should avoid hot tubs, pools, ocean or pond water, or soaks in a tub until the incision is fully healed. If your incision is closed with buried stitches and a dry dressing, you can remove the dressing after three days. The small paper strips on the incision should be left to fall off on their own.

Pain Management

After a lumbar fusion it is normal for most patients to have pain in the incision site in the back, and to have muscle spasms. Heat and ice can be used as needed. Narcotic prescriptions after the surgery should be used for severe pain only, and decreased as the pain improves. Please read the opioid medication and agreement information you were given in the office. Refills of narcotic medication are given ONLY during office appointments, and you need to bring in your pill bottle with you.

Therapy

For most patients, working with a physical therapist after the surgery can help with the recovery process. PT referrals are usually given at the first post-operative appointment.

Diet and Medication

You can resume your regular diet and most regular medications immediately after the surgery.

The plan for restarting blood thinners such as aspirin, warfarin, or other prescription blood thinners will be discussed during your discharge. Constipation is a common problem after spine surgery. Over the counter stimulants and stool softeners can be beneficial, along with plenty of fresh water.

Follow-Up Appointments

Your follow-up appointment should have been set up at the time of your pre-operative visit, about 10-12 days after the surgery. If you have staples, they will usually be removed at this visit. If you're not sure when this appointment is, call the office at (401) 606-6360.

Work

Most patients return to work 8-12 weeks after the surgery. Patients whose jobs require heavy lifting may take longer. Your return to work will be discussed with your provider in your office follow-up appointment.

What to Watch For

These symptoms should cause you to call the office immediately or dial 911 to go to the Emergency Department.

- Paralysis or inability to fully move your legs
- Severe chest pain, difficulty breathing
- Loss of control of your bowels and bladder
- Calf pain and/or swelling

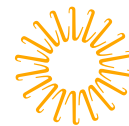
The following symptoms may indicate a problem.

You should call the office number listed below.

- Fever higher than 101°F
- Increasing back and/or leg pain
- Difficulty passing urine

- New numbness or change in symptoms from before surgery
- Redness or drainage from the incision
- Unusual headache, especially if it is much worse when you stand up

For questions after the surgery, please call 401-606-6360. If you feel you have an urgent problem outside of office hours, go to the nearest Emergency Department.



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