

Frequently Asked Questions After Spine Surgery

Below are some questions often asked about after spine surgery. You can ask anyone on your spine team questions at any time. Check the Spine Surgery Patient Education Guide for more information on these questions.

Will I wear a spine brace after surgery?

- Your surgeon **may** order a brace after surgery. It depends on your surgery and surgeon's preference.
- If a brace is ordered for you, it is usually worn for 6 to 12 weeks.
 - Your surgeon will let you know when you can stop wearing your brace at your follow-up visit.

What can I expect my level of activity to be like after surgery?

- You will be expected to walk within several hours or sooner after surgery, unless your surgeon tells you different.
 - Walking is the best exercise during your recovery.
 - Take short frequent walks every day. Gradually increase your walking distance as you can.
- Do not sit, stand, or lay down for longer than 1 hour at a time without changing positions.
- For about 6 to 12 weeks after surgery, you will have activity restrictions.
 - At your follow-up visit, your surgeon will let you know when you may return to your normal activities.
 - You will be able to use stairs. Try to limit full flights of stairs to once or twice a day at first and slowly increase as you feel comfortable.
 - Remember “No BLT with 2 pickles on the side:”
 - Do not **B**end forward or back at the waist if you have back surgery, or at the neck if you have neck surgery.
 - Do not **L**ift any objects heavier than 5 to 10 pounds (like a gallon of milk).
 - Do not **T**wist the surgical area.
 - Do not **P**ush or **P**ull (2 **P**ickles”) any objects heavier than 5 to 10 pounds.
- You can go back to sexual activity when you feel ready and comfortable.

When can I shower after surgery?

- You can take a shower the day after surgery.
- Shower every day.
 - Use a clean washcloth and clean towel for every shower.
 - Use a mild liquid soap such as Dial®.
- Gently clean around your incision first, then clean the rest of your body.
 - Do not scrub the incision directly.
- Rinse well without spraying water directly on the incision.
 - Make sure no soap remains.
- Pat your incision dry first with a clean towel, then dry the rest of your body.
 - Do not touch your incision again once you pat it dry.
- Put on clean underclothes and clothes after each shower.
- **Do not** soak the incision in a bathtub, jacuzzi, hot tub, or swimming pool for about 6 weeks after surgery or until your incision is completely healed.

Can I drive after surgery?

- Most people cannot drive for at least 2 weeks after surgery.
 - If you have a neck brace, you cannot drive until you are done wearing the brace.
- You cannot drive while you take opioid pain medicines.
- Avoid being a passenger in the car for more than 1 hour at a time.
 - If you need to take a long car trip, stop every hour to walk. Walk for 5 to 10 minutes.

What should I eat after surgery?

- Eat enough calories to keep your weight where it is.
- Eat from a variety of whole foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, lean-protein rich foods, and dairy or soy products with calcium and vitamin D.
- Constipation is common after surgery. To help with constipation:
 - Drink 8 to 10 cups of water each day, unless your doctor tells you different.
 - Eat foods high in fiber.
 - Chew gum right after surgery.

Will I be able to smoke after surgery?

- You cannot smoke for at least 3 months after surgery. Smoking may slow wound and bone healing.
- If you need help call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or visit henryford.com/tobaccofree.

Will I have physical therapy after surgery?

- During your hospital stay, you may work with a physical or occupational therapist. They will teach you to move and walk safely, do daily activities, and let you know if you need any assistive devices.
- At your first follow-up visit, your surgeon will let you know if you need outpatient physical therapy. Many people do not need this.

When can I return to work after surgery?

- This depends on the type of job you do, your surgery, and your progress after surgery.
- It will be 6 to 12 weeks for most people.

Will I have a dressing over my incision?

- At first you will have a dressing or bandage over your incision.
- For some patients, the dressing is removed during your hospital stay.
- Some may need to go home with a dressing. For those that go home with a dressing, you will get instructions at hospital discharge on when to remove the dressing.

What will be used to close my incision?

- You will have either staples, stitches, incision glue, or small strips of tape over your incision. This will depend on your surgery and your surgeon's preference.
- You will get instructions at hospital discharge.

Will I need to go to a nursing home or rehab facility after surgery?

- Most patients go home after their hospital stay. Going home instead of a rehab or nursing facility has many benefits.
- You can still go home even if you live alone.
- While we know that home is the best environment, there are some situations that may not allow you to go home right away. **Your care team will decide this with you during your hospital stay** and our discharge planners will help you make any arrangements needed.

Will I need to take opioid pain medicine after surgery? If so, for how long?

- Always follow what your surgeon tells you about pain medicine. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you have questions or concerns about the medicine you should take after surgery.
- Most patients will need to take an opioid pain medicine after surgery.
- Opioid pain medicines are used for the shortest amount of time possible.

What are non-medicine ways that will help with pain?

- Short, frequent walks.
- Relaxation/deep breathing techniques.
- Ice packs.
- Change positions often and logroll.
- Activities like TV, prayer, visitors, books and music.
- Humor.