

Post Op Instructions - Lumbar Fusion

The following postoperative instructions are guidelines and have been provided for your convenience. These may be modified for individual patients.

1. **Lifting:** No lifting, pushing or pulling objects that are over 10 lbs until cleared by your surgeon
2. **Bending/Twisting:** When bending to pick something off the floor, bend with your knees and NOT with your waist. Hold on to the back of the chair or counter when bending. Do not twist your spine in any way. In order to avoid twisting your spine at night, place a pillow between your legs and pillows at your side to prevent you from turning over on your stomach.
3. **Sitting:** Use a cushion when sitting in a chair for any period of time and make sure to ambulate frequently throughout the day. Sit upright and do not slouch.
4. **Exercise:** Please do not exercise vigorously (running, weight-lifting, swimming, etc) until cleared by your physician. Generally, patients cannot exercise vigorously for up to 8 weeks after surgery. You may walk, but rest if you start to feel uncomfortable. Start walking for 10 minutes 3-4 times per day, and you can slowly increase it up to 30 minutes 3-4 times per day, depending upon how you feel. This will prevent leg and lung clots postoperatively and aid in a better recovery.
5. **Work:** Most patients do not return to work for 8 weeks after surgery. However, individual cases may vary
6. **Sutures/staples:** Either sutures or staples have been used, so you will need to make an appointment with the clinic 21 days after the date of surgery to have them removed. If you notice small clear sutures at the skin incision, do not remove it – they will either dissolve or will be taken out at your post op visit.
7. **Wound:** If possible, leave your surgical dressing in place until your follow-up appointment. Keep your wound clean and dry at all times. If you start to notice swelling, redness or drainage from your wound, please notify the surgeon immediately. Do not apply ointments, creams, lotions, oils or solutions to your wound. If you develop blisters, redness or irritation from the tape, discontinue its use. Do not use a hot tub or pool for at least 2 months after surgery. If you have been through an Anterior lumbar Interbody Fusion (incision on stomach also), please wear the abdominal binder for four weeks after surgery to prevent an abdominal hernia from forming.
8. **Bathing:** you may take showers but make sure to keep the incision and dressing clean and dry at all times. You can cover the wound/dressing with a waterproof dressing, taped Saran wrap, or Glad press and seal. If the dressing becomes wet and needs to be removed, please replace it with a dry dressing which we have provided.

9. Driving: You should not drive for the first 14 days after surgery, except to come to the office for your first post op visit. You can ride in a car for short distances, but generally riding in a car may aggravate your back in the immediate postoperative period. Never drive while taking pain medications.

10. Energy level: try to resume a normal routine as quickly as possible. You will be more tired for a period of time after surgery (weeks to months) and it can take a while for your energy levels to return to normal.

11. Medications: You will likely be given a pain reliever, muscle relaxer and other medications. Take all of your medications on time and as prescribed. You may try decreasing your pain medications/narcotics if you feel that you are able to do so. Do not take NSAIDs (ibuprofen, ketorolac, aleve, advil, etc) for at least 12 weeks after the date of your surgery: you may take them every once in a while after this time point, but remember that these medications inhibit fusions and should be avoided if possible. It is generally a good idea to start taking a multivitamin, as well as vitamin C, immediately following your surgery, in order to help with healing. Narcotics will often times make you constipated, which can be treated with over-the-counter medications (Senekot, Dulcolax, Colace or Milk of Magnesia), drinking plenty of water and increasing your dietary fiber (vegetables, fiber supplements, etc).

12. Calcium and Vitamin D supplementation: all fusion patients should be on calcium and vitamin D supplementation to help build bone tissue. Combination pills can be purchased over the counter at your local pharmacy. Ask the pharmacist for dosing information. A common dose is calcium/vitamin D 600 mg/800 IU. Take one dose in the morning and one dose in the evening.

13. Diabetics: make sure to control your blood glucose levels and to avoid sugar in the first several weeks after surgery. If you are diabetic, you are at a higher risk for infection and this can often times be avoided with careful control of blood sugars and adhering to a diabetic diet.

14. Dental work: do not schedule dental work for 2 weeks prior to your surgery, or for 8 weeks after your surgery. If you have had a fusion surgery, you will require antibiotic pre-medication for any dental work done within a one year of your surgery.

15. Physical therapy/home strengthening exercises: these do not start until your wound has fully healed and you are doing, clinically, well enough to participate in these activities.

16. Sexual activities: is permitted whenever comfort permits.

17. Bracing: wear the brace when out of bed for the first 3 weeks. Further instructions will be given to you at your post op visit. Some people require more use than others - length of use depends on bone quality.

18. Smoking/nicotine: Smoking and nicotine containing products (vapes, chew, etc) will inhibit/slow fusion and should be avoided at all costs.

19. Bone stimulator: these can be used to simulate bone growth after fusion procedures and your provider will order one for you at your first post op visit, if required.

This list of guidelines covers the basics of what you will need to know but does not substitute for the physician's recommendations and is not comprehensive.