



Post-Surgical Care - Advice Following Spinal Surgery

Spinal surgery may involve decompression (surgical removal or partial removal of structures of the spine that are compressing neural structures) and fusion (surgical stabilisation of vertebral segments), or both procedures to one or more levels of the spine.

Following spine surgery, effective postoperative rehabilitation and education is considered vital to assist in a return to normal function and achievement of goals.

10 Tips for recovering post-surgery:

1. Restrictions

- ◆ Limit twisting and repetitive bending
- ◆ Be aware of your lifting restrictions of 2 - 5kg until 4 weeks post-surgery and then 10-15kg for 3 months from date of operation

2. Pain Management

- ◆ Pain after surgery can be expected; however, if your pain is well controlled, you will be able to start moving sooner, get your strength back and speed up your recovery after surgery
- ◆ Taking your medication regularly and timing your pain medications before going for a walk or completing your exercises will optimise your rehabilitation
- ◆ Frequent ice application is a great way to aid in your pain management
- ◆ NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) should be avoided after a fusion surgery, as it inhibits the formation of bone and delays the fusion process

3. Getting in/out of bed

- ◆ Getting in and out of bed can sometimes feel quite difficult

- ◆ The easiest way to do this is by using the 'log rolling' technique
- ◆ First, bend your knees so your feet are flat on the bed
- ◆ Then, roll on to your side, slowly lower your legs over the edge of the bed and push up with your arms

4. Movement

- ◆ Movement is an essential part of your recovery process after surgery. It helps with reducing your pain and restoring your strength
- ◆ It is important to move regularly and alternate between sitting, standing & walking
- ◆ Bend your knees and hips to raise and lower yourself while picking up objects

5. Walking

- ◆ Walking daily assists with the healing process, builds strength, and maintains muscle tone
- ◆ Start with short and frequent structured walks throughout the day and gradually build up as you are progressing
- ◆ Your aim is to accumulate 30 minutes of walking in a day post-surgery
- ◆ At four to six weeks, your goal is a 30-minute walk twice a day





6. When to call your surgeon/GP

Notify your surgeon/GP/clinic nurse if you have any of the following signs of infection:

- ◆ Redness
- ◆ Swelling
- ◆ Hot to touch
- ◆ Smelly
- ◆ Discharge/ooze from the wound
- ◆ Fevers/chills/feeling unwell

7. Swimming/Bath/Spa

- ◆ Avoid getting into the bath, a spa or swimming pool until the wound is fully healed
- ◆ If unsure, check with the clinic nurse or GP

8. Driving

Most patients are generally safe to drive two weeks post-surgery; however, if you're unsure check with your GP.

Do not drive if:

- ◆ You are affected by medication - drowsy/impaired judgement
- ◆ You have weakness in the arms or legs that prevents you from safely controlling the steering wheel or pedals
- ◆ You are unable to sit comfortably in the seat for an extended period of time i.e. 20-30 mins

9. Returning to work

- ◆ Generally, you are safe to return to an office-based job anywhere from 2 to 4 weeks after your procedure
- ◆ For more manual or labour-intensive jobs, discuss with your Surgeon or Physiotherapist

10. Physiotherapy

It is recommended that you book an appointment with your Physiotherapist prior to surgery for pre-operative rehabilitation, education, and guidance on post-surgical recovery/expectations. A physiotherapy appointment is recommended 2 weeks post-surgery to assess, review and progress your rehabilitation program. It is important that you discuss short- and long-term goals with your Physiotherapist; a return to normal activities of daily living, work, hobbies and sport is paramount.

References:

Low, M., Burgess, L., & Wainwright, T. (2019). A Critical Analysis of the Exercise Prescription and Return to Activity Advice That Is Provided in Patient Information Leaflets Following Lumbar Spine Surgery. *Medicine*.

Gilmore, S., McClelland, J., & Davidson, M. (2016). Physiotherapy management of patients undergoing lumbar spinal surgery: A survey of Australian physiotherapists. *New Zealand Journal of Physiotherapy*.

