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Care after a Lumbar Spinal Fusion

The following information will help you through your recovery at home.

PAIN:

- It is normal for you to experience pain after your surgery, most patients feel their pre-op pain has improved and they are left with a fair amount of surgical pain. This pain will improve a great deal over the 5-7 days after the operation.
- It is normal to have some ongoing pain when you get home from the hospital. The pain should slowly improve over the next several weeks to months.
- You should call Dr. Hoel's office if you have a sudden onset of pain that does not improve over 24 hours.

ACTIVITY:

- You may increase your activity as tolerated; walking is the best form of exercise after spine surgery.
- Avoid bending, lifting and twisting at the waist (BLT) for 6 weeks. Avoid activities such as vacuuming, raking and shoveling.
- Try to limit your lifting to 10lbs until 2 weeks after surgery, then less than 25lbs until 6 weeks out from surgery.
- You should anticipate being out of work approximately 4-6 weeks after your surgery, some patients are able to return sooner and others need more time. Dr. Hoel and his staff will help you determine a return to work plan.
- You may resume sexual activity 4-6 weeks after surgery. Stop if you have pain.
- Walking stimulates the healing process. Dr. Hoel wants you to accomplish a minimum of 45 minutes of **sustained** walking per day for exercise. You are encouraged to walk several times a day and there is no limit on how far you can walk. In the beginning you may only be able to walk 5-15 minutes at a time and that is okay, just do this a minimum of 4-10x/day.

DRIVING:

- You may drive if you feel strong enough and are not taking any narcotic pain medications.

INCISION SITE:

- By the time you leave the hospital you will no longer need to keep your incision covered with a dressing.
- You may shower without covering your incision once you are home from the hospital, allow water and soap to run over your incision but do not scrub the area or soak in a tub.
- Your incision is covered with steri-strips (narrow white tapes); they will get loose and fall off in 14-21 days. If they do not fall off after 21 days you may remove them or Dr. Hoel's staff will remove for you at your post-op visit.

- Most patients have dissolvable stitches, which do not need to be removed. In some cases, staples or nylon stitches are used and they need to be removed, 10-14 days after surgery. If you have staples or nylon external black sutures please call for a removal appointment with Dr. Hoel's care coordinator.

PAIN MANAGEMENT:

- Take your prescribed pain medication as needed and directed. Use Tylenol for your discomfort when you no longer need the narcotic pain medication.
- DO NOT take Ibuprofen, Aleve, Motrin, Advil or any other anti-inflammatory medication. They may affect the bone growth of your fusion.
- If you need a refill on your pain medication call 952-456-7423, please allow 24 hour for your prescription to be refilled, Dr. Hoel's office does not refill pain medications on Friday afternoons.
- Poor nutrition can lead to delayed wound healing and constipation. Good sources of lean proteins and fresh fruits and vegetable will help with this.
- Narcotic pain medications will also cause constipation. Using over the counter stool softeners, drinking plenty of fluids, ambulation, and good nutrition can help prevent this from occurring.

FOLLOW-UP VISITS:

- You should have a post-op appointment that was scheduled for you at the same time your surgery was scheduled. If you do not please call Dr. Hoel's office as soon as you get home. Your appointment will be approximately one month after your surgery.
- Write down any questions you have about your surgery, recovery, return to work and other topics you wished to be covered at your post-op visit. This way, we will be able to address all of your questions at your next visit.
- Call your doctor if you have any questions or concerns.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR:

- If you have any redness, warmth or swelling at the incision site
- If your incision opens up
- If you have increasing drainage from your incision
- If you have a temperature of more than 100.5 degrees Fahrenheit

