



## **POSTERIOR CERVICAL SURGERY (LAMINOPLASTY, LAMINECTOMY WITH FUSION)**

**PLEASE DO NOT TAKE ANY NON-STEROIDAL ANTI-INFLAMMATORY DRUGS (NSAIDs like Advil, Ibuprofen, Motrin, Naprosyn, Aleve, etc) OR ASPIRIN PRODUCTS FOR 7-10 DAYS BEFORE SURGERY.** These medications can increase bleeding during surgery. If you absolutely need to be on these medications until the date of surgery, check with **your surgeon**.

### **Your Problem Spine**

The cervical spine (“neck”) is made up of seven bones called vertebrae. These vertebrae are separated by discs, which act as “shock absorbers” for the spine. The nerve roots that go into your arms, as well as the spinal cord, are encased within this bony framework of the spine.

Nerve roots and the spinal cord can be “pinched” by herniated discs or by bone spurs which arise from arthritis (“wear and tear”, or “degeneration”) of the spine. Pinching of nerve roots can result in pain, weakness, or numbness/tingling of your neck, shoulder, upper back, arm, or fingers. Pinching of the spinal cord can additionally result in difficulty with walking or coordination.

You have decided to have surgery to address these problems. In general, the goal of the surgery is to relieve the compression on your nerves and/or spinal cord by creating more space for them. Plates, rods, and/ or screws may be used in some circumstances as discussed with you by your surgeon.

### **Incision**

An incision will be made in the back of the neck in order to obtain access to the spine. There will usually be no stitches to remove, because all of the stitches will be placed inside.

### **Brace (Collar)**

Your surgeon will tell you whether a brace (collar) will be needed after surgery. **YOU MAY NOT NEED A COLLAR AFTER SURGERY.** How long the collar is worn depends on the nature of the surgery you have.

For laminoplasty, a collar is optional and should generally not be worn while in bed or for more than 2 weeks. If you had a fusion, a collar is generally worn for 6 weeks (according to what is written in the “Instructions after surgery” sheet attached).

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#### **Hospitalization**

After surgery, you will be taken to the anesthesia recovery room. When you have satisfactorily awakened from anesthesia (usually about 2 hours later), you will then go to your hospital room. There, your family and friends will be able to see you.

#### **Activity**

You can get out of bed with assistance as early as the evening after surgery if you are able. You will be encouraged to walk during your recovery period.

#### **Diet**

You will be given liquids at first, then progress to solid food when you tolerate the liquids well.

#### **Pain control**

You will be given a PCA (patient controlled anesthesia) pump after surgery. This is a device that allows you to administer your own pain medication when you need it by simply pushing a button. Don't worry – as long as you are the only one pushing the button, it is very unlikely that you will overdose.

As soon as you are ready (usually the day after surgery), you will be switched over from the PCA to oral pain pills. Pills are advantageous in that they provide a more constant level of pain control. You will be a prescription for pain pills to take home after surgery. Instructions on how and when to take these pills are on the following pages.

#### **Drains/ Wound care**

There will most likely be a small drain in your wound that is placed during surgery to prevent blood clots from pooling in the wound. Generally, it is removed on the first day or two after surgery, depending on how much comes out of it. Your dressing will be removed at that time. The wound is then left open to air. No bandages are usually necessary.

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### POSTERIOR CERVICAL SURGERY – INSTRUCTIONS AFTER SURGERY

#### Wound care

- Keep your incision dry and clean.
- If you have them, let the steri-strips (tapes on your wound) fall off by themselves. If some remain attached 2 weeks after surgery, you may gently peel them off
- Do NOT put any ointments/lotions/antibiotic solutions on the incision
- If the wound is dry, no further dressings are needed and the incision can be left open to air. If there is some drainage, the wound can be covered with a clean dressing as needed.
- If you notice drainage, redness, swelling or increased pain at the incision, call the office

#### Showering

- You may shower when the wound has been clean and dry for 24 hours. This is typically 3-5 days after your surgery. Do not scrub the incision or soap it. Just let water run over it.
- Make sure you pat the incision completely dry after showering. Be gentle – do not scrub the incision.
- Do not immerse the incision in a pool or bath until 6 weeks after surgery

#### Collar

- If you had a FUSION and have been instructed to wear a collar *full time*, you can take the collar off 4-5 times per day for 15 minutes at a time. However, keep your head looking straight ahead during these times as much as possible.
- If your surgeon feels that you need a collar to wear while showering, it will be provided to you before you leave the hospital. If you have not been given a shower collar, you may shower without any collar.
- You can remove the collar to shave, but try not to flex or extend your neck while doing so. Keep looking straight ahead as you do these activities.
- If you had a LAMINOPLASTY (ie, no fusion), you most likely will not need to wear a collar at all.

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**POSTERIOR CERVICAL SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS AFTER SURGERY**

**Skin abrasion from the collar**

- If you have skin abrasions from the collar, you can lightly apply talc powder between the skin and brace
- Do not apply talc to open sores or the incision itself
- Alternatively, you can place a scarf, handkerchief, or tee-shirt between the area of skin abrasion and the collar to reduce skin irritation.

**Activities**

- Walk as much as you like. Walking is good for you
- Use your common sense: no strenuous or sports activities until okayed by your surgeon
- If you had a FUSION: you may exercise your arms and legs with light weights if desired as soon as you feel like it -- as long as those activities do not cause you to put undue stress on your neck. However, avoid moving your neck as much as possible.
- If you had a LAMINOPLASTY: early neck extensor muscle strengthening is important to recovery. As soon as pain allows, do extension exercises in which you extend your neck gently (ie, look up at the sky) against resistance while holding your hands on the back of your head. Hold the resistance for 5 seconds, then repeat. Doing as many of these extension exercises as possible will improve your recovery.

**Driving**

- Do not drive a car unless your surgeon has specifically allowed you to do so, or until you have seen your surgeon at follow up 2-4 weeks after surgery.
- Riding home in a car after you are discharged from the hospital is permitted. Limit the amount of time you spend riding in a car especially after surgery. After about 6 weeks, longer drives are allowed—stop occasionally to get out of the car and stretch. *Please follow any prescription warnings regarding driving, etc...*

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**POSTERIOR CERVICAL SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS AFTER SURGERY**

**Medications/Pain control**

- You can expect to have pain after surgery and medications will be prescribed to help relieve your pain. **PLEASE NOTE: Certain pain medications cannot be refilled by phone (i.e. duragesic, Morphine, Oxycontin, Percocet, Roxicet).** If you need a refill prescription, someone must come to Georgetown to pick up a prescription or it can be mailed to you. Mailed prescriptions may take several days to reach you. **If you call a day or two before you run out of your prescription, it will not reach you in time.**
- You could be switched to something else less intense than in the first few days after surgery and most of these meds can be phoned into your pharmacy.
- Pain medications are helpful around the time of surgery, but they can cause problems if taken for too long. The goal is to try to get you off of the medications by 3-4 weeks or earlier, if possible. Some people may need medications for longer than 3-4 weeks, and that's ok. But try to wean yourself off of them if you can.
- When you find that your pain is really mild, try taking plain **extra strength Tylenol** instead.
- **If you had a fusion surgery, PLEASE DO NOT TAKE ANY NON-STEROIDAL ANTI-INFLAMMATORY DRUGS (NSAIDs like Advil, Aleve, Ibuprofen, Motrin, etc) FOR 3 MONTHS AFTER SURGERY.** These medications can adversely affect fusion.
- **If you were on a baby aspirin prior to surgery, you may generally resume that 2 weeks after surgery.**
- **If you were on a blood thinner (like Coumadin/ Lovenox/ Heparin products/ Plavix), check with your surgeon as to when that may be resumed after surgery.**

**Constipation**

- The pain medicines may tend to make you somewhat constipated. Feel free to take any over the counter laxatives if you need to.
- High fiber foods and sufficient water/fluid intake are necessary.
- Please call the office if you are having difficulties even with these measures.

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**POSTERIOR CERVICAL SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS AFTER SURGERY**

**Diet**

- Eat whatever you like. You may not feel like eating too much for a few days, and that's ok. Foods high in fiber (fruits, vegetables) are good in that they can help reduce constipation.
- Drink plenty of fluids.

**Follow up**

- If you have not already been given a postoperative follow up appointment, call your surgeon's secretary within the first few days after you get home. Tell her that you had surgery and need a follow up appointment.

**Questions**

- Feel free to call your surgeon's office with any questions
- If you are having an emergency, call the Spine Center at 202-444-8766 or go to the emergency room.