



VANCOUVER ISLAND  
NEUROSURGICAL FOUNDATION

# My Posterior Cervical Spine Surgery

The Surgery Team has prepared this insert containing discharge information to help you and your family after surgery. It has information about what you can do after your surgery.

Please visit the Vancouver Island Neurosurgical Foundation website for more health information: [www.vinf.ca](http://www.vinf.ca)

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## Discharge Instructions – Posterior Cervical Spine Surgery Patients

### What can I eat and drink after my operation?

- After your surgery you might not be hungry and a large meal may not sit well in your stomach. Try eating small meals until your appetite improves and then eat what you normally would eat.
- If you feel sick to your stomach you can get anti-nausea medication from your pharmacy without a prescription (i.e. Gravol). Take it as directed and drink fluids until the nausea is gone. If the nausea continues, see your family doctor.

### What activities can I do?

- Avoid lifting more than about 4.5 kg (10 lb).
- You can start being active by walking around your house. You may experience some mild pain but this is normal and will gradually go away.
- During the day, avoid lying in bed or sitting for long periods of time by getting up every 30-60 minutes to walk.
- Stop playing sports, including walking on a treadmill or using a stationary bicycle until you have seen your surgeon at your follow up appointment in 6-8 weeks.
- At your follow up appointment, your surgeon will let you know when you can return to sports and work.

### When do I have to wear my neck collar?

- The neck collar should be worn as much as possible during the first 3 months after your neck surgery.
- You should wear it when you are up during the day, sitting, walking or in a vehicle.
- You have the option to take it off if you are lying in bed.

### When can I drive?

- If you are wearing a neck collar, you may NOT operate a vehicle.
- If you are not given a neck collar, make sure you can use the mirrors since you may not be able to shoulder check adequately.
- You should not drive if you are tired or on narcotics.

### How do I take care of my dressing (bandage) & wound?

- Keep your neck dressing on for 5 days, then remove it and DO NOT put on another dressing.
- Do not wet the back of your neck for 5 days and keep the dressing and incision clean and dry at all times.
- Do not be alarmed by the bruising or swelling around wound.
- Do not use lotions, powders or oils on the incision.

- The nurse should provide you with a staple remover before you leave the hospital. Call and make an appointment with your family doctor who should remove the staple 10 - 14 days after your operation.

#### When can I shower or bathe?

- You may shower or bathe tomorrow but do not wet the back of your neck for 5 days.
- After 5 days, you may wet your neck, and lightly pat dry your wound.
- Keep your incision clean and dry.
- DO NOT take a bath, swim or use a hot tub for at least 6 weeks.
- If you wear a neck collar after surgery, check with your nurse about wearing it in the shower. Often people use a separate hard neck collar from the hospital or separate foam inserts for their own neck collar for showering.

#### How do I cope with my pain?

- A mild amount of pain is normal; you can take Tylenol Extra Strength 1 - 2 tablets every 4 - 6 hours as needed.
- If you are given a prescription, take it to a pharmacy to get it filled and follow the directions for taking the medication.
- Take a stool softener every day while you are taking narcotics. If you have not had a bowel movement after 2 days, take a laxative which you can get from a pharmacy without a prescription.
- It is normal to have some pain after your surgery but the pain should get better with time.
- You can ask your family doctor to prescribe a milder pain medication and to assist you in weaning off your pain medication. It is better to slowly reduce the medication over time rather than stopping it suddenly.
- You may feel some muscle spasms across your neck and down your arms or back. If the nerves in your arms are inflamed or irritated, you may have some pain until the inflammation resolves after a week or two.

#### What about other medications?

- If you were on blood thinners and stopped taking them for your surgery, speak to your surgical team about when to restart them.
- If you have been given a prescription, take it to get filled at a pharmacy and take the medications as instructed by the pharmacist.
- Continue with any other medications you were on before surgery.
- If you have any questions about medications or dosages, have them answered by your nurse or surgical team before leaving the hospital.

#### When can I start physiotherapy?

- For the first 3 months after surgery, unnecessary looking up or down for prolonged periods should be avoided.
- After 3 months have passed, gradual neck range of motion exercises can be started and this can be directed by a physiotherapist.

#### When can I return to work?

- Before you leave hospital, talk to your surgeon about when you may be able to go back to work. A graduated return to work may be best in some cases.
- At your follow up appointment, your surgeon may confirm that you can return to work.

#### When should I call my family doctor?

- Within 1 week of going home, call your family doctor to make an appointment for your stitch or staple removal.
- Your family doctor can check your incision and remove stitches or staples 10 - 14 days after your surgery.
- Call your family doctor to renew or change your pain medication prescription or to talk about any other health issues.
- Please have a repeat cervical spine x-ray of your neck arranged by your family doctor prior to the follow up appointment with your surgeon.

#### What should I do if I develop a problem?

- Go to Victoria General Hospital's Emergency Department (preferred) or the nearest hospital emergency department, if you have:
  - Severe pain not helped by any medications.
  - Weakness in your arms or legs.
  - Fever ( $>38^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) or you notice any signs of infection in the incision.
  - Increased redness, swelling, leaking of pus or pain from the incision.
  - If you notice increased swelling with pain in your legs, or difficulty breathing.
  - Any trouble controlling your bowels or bladder.

#### When is my follow-up appointment?

- Call your surgeon's office (Phone: 250-383-3638 ext 2) below to make an appointment for 6-8 weeks after your surgery.
- Please have a repeat cervical spine x-ray of your neck arranged by your family doctor prior to the appointment.

Location: 2nd Floor of The CBI Health Centre at 605 Discovery Street, Victoria, B.C. V8T 5G4

Phone: 250-383-3638 ext 2

Fax: 250-383-3053

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Surgeon:

- Dr. Ian Fleetwood
- Dr. Evan Frangou
- Dr. Stephen Hentschel
- Dr. Richard Reid
- Dr. Daniel Warren
- Dr. John Sun

Special instructions for me:

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