



VANCOUVER ISLAND
NEUROSURGICAL FOUNDATION

My Thoracolumbar 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

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Discharge Instructions – Thoracolumbar Decompression and Fusion 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 back 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 can I drive?

- There are no restrictions and you may resume driving when it is safe.
- You will not be able to drive right after your surgery. Check with your nurse before you go home from the hospital for more advice. You should not drive if you are tired, on narcotics, or if you have problems with your vision.

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

- Keep your dressing on for 5 days, then remove it and DO NOT put on another dressing.
- 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 your incision for 5 days.
- After 5 days, you may wet your incision, and lightly pat dry your wound.
- Keep your incision clean and dry after showering.

- DO NOT take a bath, swim or use a hot tub for at least 6 weeks.

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 back and down your legs. If the nerves in your legs are inflamed or irritated, you may have some leg 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 bending or lifting for prolonged periods should be avoided.
- After 3 months have passed, gradual back 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.

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 legs.
 - Fever (>38°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.

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 (65743)
- Dr. Evan Frangou (65213)
- Dr. Stephen Hentschel (29840)
- Dr. Richard Reid (63227)
- Dr. Daniel Warren (65233)

Special instructions for me:

For Dr. John Sun:

His office will contact you within 2-3 weeks of discharge.

Location: 3960 Quadra St #106, Victoria, BC V8X 4A3

Phone: 250.391.7850

For more information visit our website: www.vinf.ca