Frequently Asked Questions After Spine Surgery

Will I wear a spine brace after surgery?
- Your surgeon may order a brace after surgery. This will depend on your surgery and surgeon’s preference.
- If a brace is ordered for you, it’s usually worn for 6-12 weeks. Your surgeon will let you know when you can stop wearing your brace at your follow-up visit.
- If your surgeon orders a back brace for you after surgery, you will wear it anytime you are out of bed, except when you shower or use the restroom.
- If your surgeon orders a neck brace for you after surgery, you will wear it at all times, including to sleep (unless your surgeon tells you different). Neck braces can be taken off for showers (unless your surgeon tells you different).

What level of activity can I expect after surgery?
- You will be expected to walk within a few hours or sooner after surgery, unless your surgeon tells you different.
- Walking is the best exercise during your recovery. Take short frequent walks every day. Gradually increase your walking distance as you can.
- Do not sit, stand, or lay down for longer than 1 hour at a time without changing positions.
- For about 6-12 weeks after surgery, you will have activity restrictions. At your follow-up visit, your surgeon will let you know when you may return to your normal activities. To help you remember the restrictions, just keep in mind “No BLT with 2 pickles on the side”:
  - No Bending your surgery site forward or backward.
  - No Lifting anything greater than 5-10 pounds (so nothing greater than a gallon of milk).
  - No Twisting your surgery site from side to side.
  - And the 2 pickles are no pushing or pulling anything greater than 5 -10 pounds.
- You will be able to use stairs. Try to limit full flights of stairs to once or twice a day at first and slowly increase as you feel comfortable.
- You can go back to sexual activity when you feel ready and comfortable. Keep the restrictions listed above in mind.

When can I shower after surgery?
- You can take a shower the day after your surgery.
- Shower every day.
- Use a clean washcloth and clean towel for every shower.
- Do not scrub the incision directly (gently clean around the incision).
- Use a mild liquid soap such as Dial®.
- Gently clean around your incision first, then the rest of your body.
- Rinse well without directly spraying the incision. Make sure no soap residue remains.
- Pat your incision dry first with a clean towel, then dry the rest of your body. Be careful not to re-touch your incision.
- Put on clean underclothes and clothes after each shower.
- Do NOT soak the incision in a bathtub, jacuzzi, hot tub, or swimming pool for about 6 weeks after surgery or until your incision is completely healed.

Can I drive after surgery?
- You usually can’t drive for at least the first 2 weeks after surgery. If you have a neck brace after surgery, you cannot drive until you are done wearing the neck brace (which may take up to 6-12 weeks).
- You cannot drive while on opioid pain medicines.
- Avoid being a passenger in the car for more than 1 hour at a time. If you need to take a longer car trip, please stop every hour to walk. Walk around for about 5-10 minutes.

What should I eat after surgery?
- Eat enough calories to keep your weight where it is. Try to eat from a variety of whole foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, lean-protein rich foods, and dairy or soy products with calcium and vitamin D.
- Foods high in protein (meat, milk, eggs, beans/legumes) can help with wound healing.
- Avoid heavily processed foods and beverages that are low in nutritional value like soda, sweets, and deep-fat fried foods.

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• Constipation is common after surgery. To help with constipation, drink 8-10 cups of water each day, unless your doctor tells you different. Eat foods high in fiber (3 grams or more fiber per serving) like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and beans/legumes.

Will I be able to smoke after surgery?
You cannot smoke for at least 3 months after surgery. Smoking may slow wound and bone healing. We encourage you to quit smoking totally for your health and healing process after surgery. If you need assistance call 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800- 784-8669) or visit henryford.com/tobaccofree.

Will I have physical therapy after surgery?
• During your hospital stay, you may work with a physical or occupational therapist. They will teach you how to move and walk safely, how to do basic activities of daily life, and will let you know if you need any assistive devices.
• At your first follow-up visit, your surgeon will let you know if you need outpatient physical therapy. Many people do not need this.

When can I return to work after surgery?
This will depend on the type of job you do, your surgery, and your progress after surgery. Some will return to work in a few weeks, but for most it will be 6-12 weeks from surgery.

Will I have a dressing over my incision?
At first you will have a dressing or bandage over your incision. For some patients, the dressing is removed during your hospital stay. Some may need to go home with a dressing. For those that go home with a dressing, you will get instructions at hospital discharge on when to remove the dressing.

What will be used to close my incision?
• You will have either staples, stitches, incision glue, or small strips of tape over your incision. This will depend on your surgery and your surgeon’s preference. You will get further instructions at hospital discharge.

Will I need to go to a nursing home or rehab facility after surgery?
• Most of our patients go home after their hospital stay.
• Going home instead of a rehab or nursing facility has many benefits.
• You can still go home even if you live alone.
• While we know that home is the best environment, there are some situations that may not allow you to go home right away. **Your care team will decide this with you during your hospital stay** and our discharge planners will help you make any arrangements needed.

Will I need to take opioid pain medicine after surgery? If so, for how long?
• Always follow what your surgeon tells you about pain medicine. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you have questions or concerns about the medicine you should take after surgery.
• Most patients will need to take an opioid pain medicine after surgery.
• Some people need opioids for a week after surgery, or less. Some may need them for a couple weeks or a little longer. Each person is different.
• Opioid pain medicines are used for the shortest amount of time possible. The goal is to slowly lower your pain medicine dose until it can be safely stopped. You can do this by making the time in between each dose longer.
• Other pain medicines may include acetaminophen (Tylenol®)or a muscle relaxer.
• Do not wait until your pain is bad before you take something, otherwise it may be harder to manage your pain.
• There are also non-medicine ways that you can help reduce pain such as:
  - Short frequent walks
  - Change positions often; the more you move, the less stiff you will be
  - Ice packs
  - Relaxation
  - Deep breathing exercises
  - Activities to help distract you such as watching TV, reading books, and listening to music.