

Care After Low Back Fusion Surgery



Allina Health

UNITED
HOSPITAL

General Information

The symptoms you had before surgery may take weeks or months to get better. Be patient and give your body time to heal.

Ask your doctor or member of your health care team if you have any questions or concerns.

Incision Care

- Change your dressings every day. The best time to change it is after you take a shower. (Buy 4-inch by 4-inch gauze dressings before you go to the hospital.)
- Keep your incision site dry. Change the dressing if it becomes wet.
- Check your incision site every day for redness, swelling, warmth or drainage.
- If you have staples along your incision, they will be removed at your follow-up appointment.
- If you have small strips of tape (Steri-Strips®) across your incision, do not try to remove them. They will fall off in 10 to 14 days. They do not need to be replaced.

Shower

- Take showers. Do not take a tub bath for 3 to 6 weeks.
- For at least 1 week: cover your incision when you shower. Tape plastic wrap over your incision. Remove the plastic wrap and tape after your shower.
- Use a shower stool to sit on if you are concerned about your safety.
- Have everything at a height you can reach.
- Do not try to pick up anything you drop.

Food and Drink

- Eat healthful foods.
- Eat fresh fruit, vegetables and whole grains.
- Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water and juice unless your doctor gives you other directions.

Exercise

- Do any exercises you started in the hospital.

Walking

- Walking is the best exercise to regain your strength and endurance.
- Start by walking inside your home.
- Slowly increase the distance and number of times you walk each day.
- If you feel sore or pain, cut back the amount of walking until you are more comfortable.
- Do not stop walking. Walk outside or at local shopping malls.

Sitting

- The greatest amount of pressure is placed on your low back when you sit. This position will become more comfortable with time.
- Sit only for 15 to 30 minutes at one time, a few times each day, including when you eat meals.
- Over time, you will feel more comfortable when sitting for longer periods. Use good posture:
 - Sit up straight with your hips and knees level.
 - Keep your neck and back in a straight line.
 - Sit in a firm chair or stool with arm rests to help with posture and help you get up.
 - Use a support cushion in small of back as needed.

Brace

- You may need to wear a brace after surgery. This is an important part of your healing. Do not stop using it until your doctor says it's OK.
- If you have a hard shell chest-to-hip (also known as a TLSO) brace:
 - Wear it as directed.
 - To put it on, lie on your back on a flat surface. Place the brace around you, and adjust the fit by log rolling from side to side. Make sure the brace fits snugly on your waist. Tighten the straps for a secure fit.
 - You may shower with the brace on. Lie down on a flat surface and reverse the above directions to remove the brace. Carefully dry off your skin and the brace before replacing it.

- If you have a binder and corset:
 - Wear both during the day and only the binder at night.
 - Remove it before you take a shower and put it on as soon as you are done.
 - Your doctor will talk with you about slowly stopping using your brace about 6 months after surgery.
- Wear a dry, wrinkle-free cotton undershirt under your brace. This will help keep your skin healthy.
- Wash your brace and pads once a month and check for loose screws.
- Call your orthotist if your brace needs repairs or adjustments.
- Call your doctor if you develop redness, pressure areas or sores near the braced area.

Lifting

- Do not lift anything heavier than 5 pounds unless your doctor OKs it.
- Lift items at waist level. Carry the object close to your body.
- Do not lift anything off the floor or over your head.
- Ask for help when you need it.

Bending

- Limit how much you bend.
- If you have to bend, do it with a straight back and bent knees. Bend slowly and carefully with something to hold onto if possible.
- Get a “reacher” to pick things up off the floor. Squatting down to pick things up will quickly tire you out.
- Ask for help when you need it.

Twisting

- Do not do any activities that involve twisting such as raking, sweeping, or vacuuming for the next 4 months.

Standing

- You will likely get tired quickly when you stand.
- Use good posture.

Lying Down

- Lie down on a mattress or couch that provides good support.
- Do the log roll to get in and out of bed as you did in the hospital.
- Use extra cushions or pillows under your knees when lying on your back, or between your knees when lying on your side.

Stairs

- Limit stairs to just a few at one time. Use a hand rail for support.
- Slowly increase the number of stairs you take. Do not push yourself.

Driving

- Do not drive for 2 weeks after surgery.
- You may ride in a car for short trips of 15 to 30 minutes.
- As you can sit for longer amounts of time, limit your car riding to 45 minutes. Get out of the car and walk for a few minutes.
- Use good posture when getting in and out of the car. Use a support cushion in the small of your back for comfort, if needed.
- Never drive if you are taking prescription pain medicine (opioids).

Sexual Activities

- You may resume sexual activities as you feel comfortable.
- If you did not receive the booklet “Sex and Back Pain,” call 651-430-3800 and ask for a copy.

Medicines

You will receive a prescription for a pain medicine before you leave the hospital.

- Use this medicine **only** when acetaminophen (Tylenol®) does not give enough pain relief.
- Limit acetaminophen to 4,000 milligrams each day.
- Do not to take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicine (NSAIDS) such as ibuprofen (Advil® and Motrin®) and naproxen (Aleve®) for 6 to 12 months after surgery. These medicines can interfere with the fusion process.

Long-term use of prescription pain medicines may interfere with your body's natural ability to help control pain.

Over time, you need more and more pain medicine to receive the same pain relief. Use prescription pain medicine as needed and only for a short time.

When To Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor if you have:

- a temperature of 101 F or higher
- yellow or green drainage from your incision or more than a slight amount of bloody drainage
- redness, swelling, or warmth around your incision
- new or unusual pain, numbness or tingling
- any bowel or bladder changes
- there is an opening in your incision
- pain in your calf or pressure in your legs
- questions or concerns.

Call 651-430-3800 to talk with your health care team if you have any questions about your surgery.

When To Call 911

Call 911 if you have:

- chest pain
- shortness of breath
- problems breathing.





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