

Recovery at Home

Recovery Time

Your recovery can take weeks or months. Be patient and do not try to rush anything.

Use caution when moving and follow your health care provider's directions.

What to Do at Home

- You can only take showers after surgery. Do not take baths.
 - You may use a stool to sit on (like you did in the hospital).
 - Keep your soap, shampoo and other items within your reach.
 - If you drop something, do not try to pick it up. Ask for help or have extra supplies handy.
- Keep items you use often within easy reach.
 - Ask for help if you need it.
- Do not run errands or go on long outings for the first couple of weeks after surgery. This includes shopping.
 - Ask for help with your errands.
 - Have items you need such as groceries delivered to your home, if possible. Have someone help you put the items away.
- Rest when you need it.
- Set up a place in the main area of your home where you are comfortable and can be around others.
- Follow your health care provider's directions for wearing your brace, binder or corset.
 - Do not take it off before you are supposed to, even if you are feeling better.
 - Taking it off could cause damage and put your recovery at risk.
 - Talk with your health care provider if your brace, binder or corset causes you problems.
- Follow your health care provider's directions for exercise.
 - Try not to lift anything heavier than 5 pounds until your health care provider says it is OK.
 - Do not bend and twist a lot.
 - You can increase exercise in your arms and legs before you can lift weight with your back muscles.
 - Talk with your health care provider about when you can start your back exercises. Ask him or her to explain any exercise you do not understand.

- Follow your health care provider's directions for pain medicine.
 - If you had a fusion surgery: do not take nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (known as NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®) and naproxen (Aleve®) for 6 to 12 months after surgery. These medicines can interfere with the fusion process.
 - Narcotic (opioid) pain medicine is available only with a doctor's prescription. The goal of narcotic pain medicine is to help you be active. Moving around will help prevent problems, such as blood clots or constipation.
 - Depending on your surgery and condition, your medicine may be refilled for up to 3 months after surgery.
 - Eat before you take this medicine.
 - Drink plenty of water with this medicine.
 - Write down when you take this medicine and how many pills you take.
 - **Do not drive or drink alcohol when you are taking this medicine.** The medicine will affect your ability to make decisions or react quickly.
 - Take your recommended doses when your pain is at its worst. Slowly cut back (taper) on the narcotic when you think your pain is under control. Ask your health care provider for specific instructions on how to taper.
 - Put your narcotic medicine in a secure place to prevent others from using it.

Returning to Work

- If your job involves desk work or light duty and you have flexibility with your hours, you can return to work when you are no longer taking prescription pain medicine and you feel well enough to work. In general, this is about 2 to 6 weeks after surgery.
- If your job involves lifting or physical labor, you may be out of work up to 12 weeks after surgery.

Avoiding Constipation, Nausea or Diarrhea

Prescription pain medicine can slow down your digestion. This can cause constipation (hard stools), nausea (upset stomach) or diarrhea (loose stools).

To help you avoid any of these issues while you are taking prescription pain medicine:

- Drink at least 8 glasses of water each day.
- Eat more foods high in fiber (fresh fruits, vegetables and whole grains).
- Increase your physical activity. Walking is a good choice.

You may try a stool softener or laxative to prevent constipation.

Talk with your health care provider if you have nausea you cannot control. He or she may change your pain medicine or have you try anti-nausea medicine.