

## Capital Neurological Surgeons

### Michael Chan MD: Post Operative Instructions after spine surgery.

The most important thing to remember is that the surgical incision takes up to 12 months to fully heal. Most patients feel that the incisional pain is almost completely gone by 4 weeks, but they must remember that the incision is not even 30% healed at 4 weeks. Any strenuous activities prior to complete healing of the incision may result in permanent back pain that will never resolve.

#### First two weeks:

The goal of the first two weeks is to recover from the surgery. On smaller surgeries, about 50% of patients report being completely pain free by one week. Despite this, there are strict limitations on what activities may be done. Just because the incision does not hurt, it does not mean that the incision is healed. Healing takes at least 6 months.

1. **There are no bed rest requirements.** Do what you would do normally. Alternate your activities. Sit on the couch, a recliner, chairs, go for short walks or rest in bed. Do not do any one activity for a prolonged period of time. Sitting in a car for more than 30 minutes may be uncomfortable after surgery, most patients tolerate longer car rides at one month. Driving is allowed if you are more than 24 hours after your last dose of pain medications or muscle relaxant.
2. **Do not walk more than the length of a long hallway.** Just because your spine feels good does not mean that you can walk long distances without straining your incision. Remember the guidelines:
  - a. Week 1 to Week 2: Walk no more than 5 mins then rest for one hour
  - b. Week 3: Walk 8 mins, then rest for one hour
  - c. Week 4: Walk 10 mins, then rest for one hour
3. **Exercise:** Not permitted. No heavy lifting over 10 pounds. Do not pick up small children or small animals. No lawn mowers, no vacuum cleaners and no laundries.
4. **Hygiene:**
  - a. Days 1-5: Sponge bath only
  - b. Days 6-14: Shower but keep the incision dry.
5. **Dressing:** Keep the incision covered for at least 3-5 days. Most patients prefer to keep a dry dressing over the incision to avoid irritating the incision with clothing. You may change the dressing once a day.
6. **No sexual intercourse.**

#### Weeks 2-6.

Some activity may be incorporated into your daily routine. There are still very strict limitations on activity.

1. **Exercise:** Lifting up to 10 pounds is acceptable. You may use a stationary cycle. Aquatic therapy or swimming is permitted.
  - a. Walking longer distances is permitted, however, if your surgical incision is sore after walking too far, you must cut back on the distances.
  - b. No jogging, no treadmills, no weight lifting, no aerobics.
2. **For people with cervical neck fusion,** no massage or manipulations of the neck is permitted.
3. **At 4 weeks, some housework is permitted.** However, if your surgical incision is sore after the activity, you must stop immediately!
4. **May resume sexual intercourse at 4 weeks after surgery.**

### **Weeks 6-Month 3**

1. **Light exercise is allowed at 6 weeks.** No heavy lifting of weights beyond 5-10 pounds.
  - a. No axial loading exercises: Shoulder press, incline bench press, squats, dead lifting.
  - b. If your surgical incision is sore after a particular exercise, you must stop that exercise.
2. **Elliptical Cardiovascular machines are allowed at this time.**
  - a. Treadmills and jogging are not allowed

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Month to 6<sup>th</sup> month**

More activity is resumed, however, if your surgery incision is painful or sore after any activity, you must modify or stop that activity.

1. Jogging is allowed.
2. May increase weight lifting to 20 pounds, no axial loading exercises.
3. Bicycling is allowed, however, crashes at this stage may have catastrophic results.

### **Beyond 6 Months**

Most patients are able to resume full activity at this time. If you are experiencing pain from your incision with some activities at this stage, you must rest and stop the activity.