

Capital Neurological Surgeons

Kevin Hsieh MD: Post Operative Instructions after spine surgery.

The most important thing to remember is that the surgical incision and the muscles surround it 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.

First two weeks:

The goal of the first two weeks is to recover from the surgery. On smaller surgeries, about 50% of patients report having significantly less pain by one week. Despite this, there are strict limitations on what activities may be done.

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, and prolonged sitting is usually the most uncomfortable position. Driving is allowed if you are more than 24 hours after your last dose of pain medications or muscle relaxant.

1. Frequent short walks are ideal. Find comfortable distances to walk, and repeat this walk multiple times a day before attempting to go further. Decrease the distance and effort involved if there is worsening of pain.
2. **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.
3. **Hygiene:**
 - a. Days 1-5: Sponge bath only
 - b. Days 6-14: Shower but keep the incision dry. If it gets wet, pat it dry without scrubbing.
4. **Dressing:** Keep in the incision covered for at least 3 days. Most patient prefer to keep a dry dressing over the incision to avoid irritating the incision with clothing. You may change the dressing once a day if it gets wet, or there is any drainage.
5. No sexual intercourse.
6. **Temperature:** Normal up to 100.5.
 - a. Please communicate with my office if your temperature remains elevated after 2 weeks.

Weeks 2-6.

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

1. **Exercise:** 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. Once again, frequent short walks

are safer. Increase the frequency of activity before increasing the length or intensity of activity.

- 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.
5. If you had a fusion surgery, no lifting of 10 pounds until 10 weeks postop.

Weeks 6-Month 3

1. Light exercise is allowed at 6 weeks. No heavy lifting of weights beyond 5-10 pounds with any fusion surgery. If there is no fusion, you may begin to lift slowly increasing amounts of weight over 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. Recovery often means having more and more good days interspersed with occasional “sore” or “bad” days. Having a day with increased pain often follows a good day with increased activity. If there is prolonged worsened pain or any weakness, please notify your physician.

3rd Month to 6th 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.