

# Recovering at Home After Surgery

You are about to go home after your spine surgery. You and your family will find these instructions helpful when preparing for your recovery. You will find that every day gets a little better and before long you will feel more like yourself.

**Wound Care:** You will go home with a bandage covering the spine incision. You will be asked to follow one of these plans to take care of your incision:

☐ The bandage can be changed every other day until you are 7 days out from surgery. If the bandage becomes wet or soiled sooner, go ahead and change it. Just remove the bandage and replace it with a clean dressing, folding a 4X4 gauze pad in half, with a little bit of tape to hold it in place. Do not use any ointments or cleaners on the incision. Leave the steri-strips in place until they begin to loosen and come off.

☐ Leave the bandage in place until you return for your first follow-up appointment. If the bandage is coming off you can change it following the instructions above.

Be sure to call your doctor's office if there is drainage from the wound or if the incision is getting red and more tender.

**Bathing:** As long as the incision is closed and there is no wound drainage, you can shower after 5 to 7 days from surgery. Before that time, you will need to sponge bathe. Your hair can be washed in the sink until you are able to get into the shower.

**Activity restrictions:** We would like you to be up and walking throughout your house. You will find that each day you will have more energy and less pain and you will be able to tolerate more and more walking. If you are doing well, you can go outside for a walk. In the beginning you will need to take a few rest periods throughout the day to lie down. Your family will help you decide when you are comfortable enough and have enough energy to make an outing away from home. You should not do any activity more strenuous than walking until you get the clearance from your doctor. Avoid bending over at the waist or twisting your spine. Do not lift any more than 10 pounds which is about the weight of a gallon jug of milk. Be careful not to lift pets or young children.

**Diet and Nutrition:** When you go home you can return to your normal diet. You should drink plenty of fluids and eat fruits and high fiber foods, like bran cereals or muffins to help keep your bowels moving. Eating smaller more frequent meals may be best to start out with if your appetite has not returned to normal. Make sure you have some food in your stomach before taking your pain medications. Your body needs extra calories and protein for the first six weeks after surgery to heal. You will find a handout in this folder that gives ideas of foods to add to your diet to be sure you get good nutrition.

**A word about constipation:** It is very common for people to become constipated while on pain medications. You should be taking a stool softener every day until off the narcotic pain medications. If eating high fiber foods is not enough to keep your bowels regular, you may need added help to get you going. Miralax or Senna can be helpful and are both over the counter and sold at your local pharmacy or grocery store. Just follow the dosing directions on the package. When you have stopped the pain meds and your bowels have returned to normal, you can stop taking these medications.

**Returning to school:** Most kids need to recover at home for 3 to 4 weeks before returning to school. Most schools can provide a homebound teacher to help you keep up with assignments. School will take a lot of energy in the beginning. Many kids find that the easiest way to transition back to school is to go for a few partial days at first, then advance to full days. You will have to stay out of gym and sports for the next few months, until your doctor gives you permission to participate. You will need to remember your lifting restrictions in school. Your backpack probably weighs more than 10 pounds. Find out if it is possible to get 2 sets of books so you can keep one set at home and don't have to carry as much in your backpack. Another option is to use a bag on wheels or to have a friend carry your books for you. Let us know if you need any notes for school to make the transition easier.

**Return to driving:** Driving is usually restricted for 4-6 weeks. You must be completely off any narcotic medications and fully able to turn your head over your shoulder without pain to safely operate the car.

**When to call your doctor's office:** You can always call if you have a question or problem related to the surgery. Be sure to call if there are any signs of infection such as fever over 101 F, wound drainage, redness and pain around the incision. Changes in sensation in your legs, a new weakness or numbness or tingling in your legs, losing control of your bladder or bowels all can be signs of neurological changes and need to be called in. Call if the pain is not controlled by the pain medication.



# Treating Your Pain at Home

Your spine surgery has caused you pain and will need to be treated at home with medications and other comfort measures. For the first few days at home, take your medicine on a regular schedule, like you did in the hospital. The amount of pain changes over the first week after surgery. The amount of pain should be checked often so that you will get the right amount of medicine for your pain. Over the next 2-3 weeks, your pain will decrease and you will need less pain medication. Here are some helpful suggestions to help you manage your pain.

## What kinds of medications will I take?

**Opioids:** Pain medicines like oxycodone are used for severe pain. These medicines will make you sleepy and also constipated. They can also slow down your breathing, make you dizzy and can cause nausea.

**Acetaminophen or Tylenol** is a pain medicine that helps with mild to moderate pain. It can also be taken at the same time as the opioids to boost your pain relief. There is a maximum amount that you can take each day. Doses that are too high can harm your liver.

**Ibuprofen** is an anti-inflammatory and will help with mild to moderate pain caused by inflammation after surgery.

**Diazepam or Valium** is used to decrease your muscle spasms. This medication can also make you very sleepy and can make you dizzy.

## When should I take these medications?

- Take your opioid every 4-6 hours around the clock to provide steady pain relief
- If you are prescribed 1-2 tablets you will need to choose how many to take around the clock for your pain. If you choose to take 1 tablet, you can always add the second tablet if the pain is severe (over a pain score of 6).
- For the first few days you may want to awake during the night to take your pain medicine. This will help to keep your pain level down so you won't wake up in severe pain.
- Take your Tylenol every 4 hours around the clock to provide steady pain relief.
- Take your Ibuprofen every 6 hours around the clock to add to the pain relief.
- Take your Valium just when you are having muscle spasms.

## **What should I do if the pain medicines are not working and the pain is getting worse?**

If you are taking the full amount of your pain medication and nothing is working, you need to call your doctor's office. You can also try other comfort measures such as changing your position, stretching and massage.

## **When and how do I decrease these medications?**

- Take your Tylenol and Ibuprofen around the clock until you come back for your first check up.
- If you're too sleepy or too dizzy, you should decrease the opioids and valium you take by spreading the time in between doses or decreasing the number of tablets you take at a time.
- Stop your Valium after 7-10 days or sooner if you are not having spasms.
- In about 10 days you should start decreasing your opioids because the pain from surgery is usually less.
  - o First, spread the time between opioids from 4 to 6 hours or from 6 to 8 hours.
  - o Change from taking the meds around the clock to 3 times a day when you need them, such as in the morning, before activities and at bedtime.

If your pain level is low and you are comfortable with only Tylenol and Ibuprofen, you can stop your opioids

## **Will I get addicted to the opioid medications?**

You will not get addicted to your opioids. If you take opioids for a long time your body becomes dependent on the drug. If the opioid is cut down or stopped too quickly, you could have symptoms of opioid withdrawal. These are sweating, chills, headache, and nausea.

## **How do I keep track of my medicines?**

Sometimes it is hard to remember the times and the amounts of medication you've taken. A simple chart can be helpful to record your pain levels and the medication and is included in your folder.

## **What other things can I do to help with my pain?**

Many non-drug therapies can help you relax and decrease your pain. Remember to use the ones that work for you: deep breathing, music, massage, watching TV, having friends visit, a milk shake and a warm blanket.



## Pain Medication Chart

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# Calorie-Protein Booster



## **Powered milk (33 kcal/tbsp, 3 gm protein/tbsp)**

Add 2-4 tbsp to 1 cup milk. Mix into puddings, potatoes, soups, ground meats, vegetables, cooked cereal)

## **Evaporated milk (25kcal, 1 gm protein/tbsp)**

Use in place of whole milk, in desserts, baked goods, meat dishes and cooked cereals.

## **Sweetened condensed milk (60kcal, 1 gm protein/tbsp)**

Add to pies, puddings, and milkshakes. Mix 1-2 tbsp with peanut butter and spread on toast.

## **Peanut butter (95 kcal, 4 gm protein/tbsp)**

Serve on toast, crackers, bananas, apples, celery, carrot, ect.

## **Egg (80kcal, 7 g protein per egg)**

Add to casseroles, meat loaf, mashed potatoes, cooked cereal, macaroni & cheese.

Add extra to pancake batter and French toast (Do not use raw eggs in uncooked items)

## **Butter or margarine (45 kcal/tsp)**

Add to pudding, casseroles, sandwiches, vegetables, cooked cereal.

## **Cheese (100 kcal, 7 gm protein/oz)**

Give as snacks, or in sandwiches. Add melted to casseroles, potatoes, vegetables, soup.

## **Wheat germ (25kcal/tbsp)**

Add a tablespoon or two to cereal. Mix into meat dishes, cookie batter, casseroles.

## **Mayonnaise or Salad Dressing (45 kcal/tsp)**

Use liberally on sandwiches, on salads, as a dip for raw vegetables or sauce on cooked vegetables.

## **Sour cream (26kcal/tbsp)**

Add to potatoes, casseroles, dips; use in sauces, baked goods.

## **Carnation Instant Breakfast 130kcal, 7 gm/pct**

Add to milk, milkshake