

Cervical Fusions - After Your Surgery

Please remember to be patient during your recovery process. Proper healing takes time. Muscle stiffness and discomfort are normal for several weeks after your surgery. Any restrictions that you are asked to adhere to are made with your health and recovery in mind. We would like you to have the best possible outcome.

Q: What diet should I follow when I get home?

A: You may resume your regular diet after returning home from the hospital. Try to maintain a healthy well-balanced diet during the first 6 weeks. You may find that your appetite is decreased in the early post-operative period. It is also not unusual to prefer softer foods during the first few weeks as they are easier to swallow when recovering from cervical surgery.

Q: What activities will I be restricted from after surgery?

A: Do not lift any objects over 5-10 pounds or do any neck exercises until you have seen Dr. Van for a follow-up visit after your surgery. He will instruct you when you can resume these activities. Please do not play any contact sports. Otherwise, stay as active as possible. Walking is very good exercise to stay up and moving around. You may climb steps. Refrain from activities which require bending, twisting or straining of the neck.

Q: When should I wear the collar that I was given?

A: Until your first visit with Dr. Van or Anna, you should wear your collar at all times. At this first visit, after x-rays are taken, it will be determined whether you can start weaning away from the collar. Your rigid collar may be replaced by a softer one at this first visit. Usually, the collar is discontinued after 3-6 weeks, depending on the progress of healing.

Q: Can I drive?

A: No driving. You can, however, be a passenger in the car. Driving status will be addressed at your first post-operative visit and will depend on your healing.

Q: Can I return to work?

A: No working, please. You can expect to be out of work anywhere from 2-12 weeks, depending on the type of work you do. Please make it a point to discuss your personal work situation with Dr. Van.

Q: Can I shower when I get home?

A: Showering is okay, but only if your incision is covered. You may shower without the collar but please be careful. Do not let water hit the incision directly. After showering, gently pat the incision dry. Apply a new clean, dry bandage and replace the collar. Please have someone nearby when showering in case you need help.

Q: How should I take care of my incision?

A: A covering or bandage needs to be kept over your incision for the first 2 weeks after your surgery. Change the dressing daily or more often if needed. In most cases, your sutures will be absorbable and none will need to be removed. If there is a knot or piece of suture above the skin, do not cut it. If it is irritating, simply keep it covered. It will be removed at your first post-op visit. Please do not put any ointments on your incision.

Q: What can I do if I am constipated?

A: Both the surgery itself and some of the medications you will be given for pain can slow down bowel function. You want to be sure that you are having regular bowel movements. An over-the-counter stool softener can help you avoid problems with constipation.

Q: What can I do to help relieve stiffness in my neck?

A: Again, stiffness and discomfort are both normal in the weeks following surgery. Heating pads or warm showers can be used to help relax stiff muscles.

Q: What do I do if I feel nauseous when I get home?

A: One of the prescriptions you will be sent some with, Phenergan, will be for nausea. Do not hesitate to take this to relieve your symptoms.

Q: When should I make a follow up appointment?

A: Your first post-operative visit will be with Dr. Van's physician assistant, Anna. Make an appointment to see her 10 days – 2 weeks after you leave the hospital. Call Hilary at 285-2300 ext 148 to make your appointment. X-rays will be taken at this visit to make sure that everything is healing properly. You will see Dr. Van during any subsequent visits.

If you have any questions or concerns during the post-operative period, please feel free to contact Jessica at (804) 285-2300 ext 156. A physician is on call 24 hours a day but please remember that this is for emergencies only.

Contact the office if you experience any of the following symptoms:

- **Increased weakness (greater than before surgery) or a new weakness in your arms or legs.**
- **A temperature elevation greater than 101 degrees.**
- **Loss of bowel or bladder control.**
- **Hoarseness of your voice or swallowing difficulty.**
- **Redness, swelling or drainage noted from the incision.**

If you feel that your condition is a medical emergency, do not hesitate to go to your local emergency room. Please note that no medication refills will be granted when the office is closed.