

Lumbar Discectomies and 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 back 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. Refrain from activities which requires bending, twisting or straining of the back. No bending with the hands below the knee caps for 6 weeks if you have had a fusion. Squatting is okay as long as you keep one leg behind you while the back is straight.

If you have a fusion, limit sitting time to 30 minutes several times each day. Time can be increased to 45-60 minutes after the 3rd week or as tolerated. Sit in a straight back chair with armrests. Do no slouch.

Otherwise, stay as active as possible. Walking is an excellent way to stay active and is crucial to a good recovery. Start with short frequent walks and slowly increase the duration with each walk. You may climb steps as tolerated.

Sexual activity is okay 3 weeks after your surgery unless instructed otherwise. Position should be dependent (on your back).

Q: When should I wear the corset/brace that I was given?

A: Until your first visit with Dr. Van or Anna, you should wear your brace or corset at all times when you are upright. You may take the brace off when sleeping unless instructed to do otherwise. At your first visit, x-rays will be taken and Dr. Van or Anna will determine whether you can start weaning away from the brace. You will generally be weaned out of the corset or brace within 6-12 weeks.

Q: Can I drive?

A: No driving. You can, however, be a passenger in the car as tolerated. Driving status will be addressed at your first post-operative visit and will depend on your healing. If you are going on a long car or plane ride, try to stop and walk around every 45 minutes to 1 hour. Do wear your brace in the car.

Q: Can I return to work?

A: No working, please. You can expect to be out of work anywhere from 6-16 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 corset/brace but please be careful not to bend or twist. Do not let water hit the incision directly. After showering, gently pat the incision dry. Apply a new clean, dry bandage and replace the brace. Please have someone nearby when showering in case you need help.

Q: How should I take care of my incision?

A: A covering or dressing 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: Will I need physical Therapy?

A: Most patients will require some form of physical therapy after surgery. After you have healed sufficiently and been weaned out of your brace, you will be sent for therapy to strengthen you back, legs and surrounding musculature. Usually, therapy is 2-3 times a week for 4-8 weeks.

Q: What medications should I avoid after surgery?

A: Use of anti-inflammatory medications (Advil, Motrin, Naprosyn, Mobic, etc) and aspirin is generally discouraged during the first 3 months following a lumbar fusion. Use of these medications has been associated with lower fusion recovery rates in some people following spinal fusion.

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 back?

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 (804) 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 lasting for 24 hours.**
- **Loss of bowel or bladder control.**
- **Development of severe pain (as intense as it was before surgery).**
- **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.