

Endoscopic Decompression Discharge Instructions

Congratulations on completing your endoscopic spinal decompression surgery! These instructions will help guide your recovery at home. Please read them carefully and keep them for reference.

Understanding Your Recovery

Endoscopic spine surgery is a minimally invasive technique that uses smaller incisions and causes less disruption to your muscles and tissues than traditional open surgery.[] This means you can expect a faster recovery with less pain and a quicker return to your normal activities.[1]

Important: Your nerve-related symptoms (such as numbness, tingling, or shooting pain down your leg) may take time to fully resolve. Even though the pressure on your nerve has been relieved, nerves heal slowly and it can take weeks to months for these symptoms to completely go away. This is normal and expected. Be patient with your recovery.

Activity Guidelines

What You Can Do

- **Start walking the day after surgery** - walking is one of the best things you can do for your recovery[2][3]
- Walk several times throughout the day, gradually increasing your distance as you feel able
- You may climb stairs, but take your time and use the handrail
- Return to light activities around the house as you feel comfortable
- **There is little evidence for strict activity restrictions after decompression surgery** - the key is to stay active and gradually return to your normal routine[2]

Returning to Normal Activities

- Most patients return to driving within **11 days** after endoscopic decompression[4][5]
- You may resume driving when you are no longer taking narcotic pain medications and can comfortably sit and move

- Most patients return to work within **14 days**, though this varies based on the type of work you do[\[4\]\[5\]](#)
- Desk work can typically be resumed sooner than physically demanding jobs
- **Over 90% of patients are able to return to driving and work** after this type of surgery[\[4\]\[5\]](#)
- Gradually increase your activity level as tolerated
- Avoid high-impact activities and contact sports until cleared by your surgeon

What to Avoid

- Do not lift heavy objects (generally nothing heavier than 10-15 pounds) for the first few weeks
- Avoid excessive bending, twisting, or prolonged sitting in the early recovery period
- Do not perform activities that cause sharp pain
- Avoid smoking - it significantly slows healing and can worsen your recovery

Bathing and Showering

- You may shower **24 hours after surgery**
- Let water run gently over your incision - do not scrub it
- Pat the incision dry with a clean towel after showering
- **Do not take baths, use hot tubs, or go swimming** until your surgeon says it is safe (usually 2-4 weeks)

Wound Care

Your incision is closed with skin glue (also called surgical adhesive):

- The glue will peel off on its own in 7-14 days - **do not pick at it**
- You do not need to apply any ointments or creams to the incision
- Keep the area clean and dry between showers
- It is normal to see some bruising or swelling around the incision

- Because endoscopic surgery uses very small incisions, your wound should heal quickly with minimal scarring[1]

Medications

Pain Management

- Some pain and discomfort after surgery is normal and expected
- Take your pain medications exactly as prescribed
- Most patients are able to stop taking narcotic pain medications within **7 days** after minimally invasive decompression surgery[5]
- Use ice packs on your back for 15-20 minutes at a time to help reduce pain and swelling
- Pain typically improves gradually over the first few weeks

Other Prescribed Medications

- Take all medications exactly as prescribed by your surgeon
- Do not stop taking any medications without talking to your surgeon first
- Contact your surgeon if you experience side effects from any medications

When to Call Your Surgeon

Contact your surgeon's office right away if you notice:

- Increasing redness, warmth, or swelling around your incision
- Drainage or fluid leaking from your incision
- Fever over 101.5°F (38.6°C)
- Severe or worsening back or leg pain
- New numbness, weakness, or tingling in your legs (different from what you had before surgery)
- Difficulty urinating or loss of bowel/bladder control
- Severe headache or changes in vision

Exercise and Staying Active

- **Staying active and gradually returning to your normal activities is important for your recovery**[\[2\]](#)[\[6\]](#)
- Your surgeon may recommend specific exercises or physical therapy to help strengthen your back[\[7\]](#)[\[8\]](#)
- Early functional exercises can improve your recovery and quality of life[\[9\]](#)
- Exercise programs after decompression surgery can help reduce pain and improve your ability to perform daily activities[\[8\]](#)
- Continue gentle movement and walking exercises at home as tolerated

Follow-Up Appointment

You have a follow-up appointment scheduled for approximately 2 weeks after surgery. Please call the office if you did not receive an appointment time or need to reschedule.

At this visit, your surgeon will:

- Check your incision healing
- Assess your recovery progress
- Discuss when you can return to work and normal activities
- Answer any questions you have

Important Reminders

- **Do not smoke** - smoking significantly slows healing and can prevent you from getting the full benefit of your surgery
- Maintain a healthy diet and stay well-hydrated
- Get plenty of rest, but avoid staying in bed all day - staying active is important[\[2\]](#)[\[3\]](#)
- Gradually return to your normal routine as you feel able
- Keep all follow-up appointments with your surgeon
- Be patient with nerve-related symptoms - they may take weeks to months to fully resolve

What to Expect During Recovery

- The advantages of endoscopic surgery include smaller incisions, less tissue damage, reduced blood loss, shorter hospital stays, and faster recovery times[1]
- Most patients experience significant improvement in their symptoms after surgery
- Your back pain and leg pain should improve, though nerve-related symptoms like numbness or tingling may take longer to resolve completely
- Full recovery typically occurs over the first few months after surgery
- Most patients are able to return to their normal activities and enjoy an improved quality of life[4]

If you have any questions or concerns about your recovery, please contact Dr. Foster's office at Olympia Orthopaedic Associates.

References

1. [Advances in Endoscopic Lumbar Spine Surgery: A Comprehensive Review of the Techniques Used for the Treatment of Lumbar Disc Herniations and Spinal Stenosis and Lumbar Spinal Fusion.](#) Kwon B, Moon A. The Spine Journal : Official Journal of the North American Spine Society. 2025;;S1529-9430(25)00302-X. doi:10.1016/j.spinee.2025.06.004.
2. [The Development of an Evidence-Based Patient Booklet for Patients Undergoing Lumbar Discectomy and Un-Instrumented Decompression.](#) McGregor AH, Burton AK, Sell P, Waddell G. European Spine Journal : Official Publication of the European Spine Society, the European Spinal Deformity Society, and the European Section of the Cervical Spine Research Society. 2007;16(3):339-46. doi:10.1007/s00586-006-0141-9.
3. [A Randomised Controlled Trial of Post-Operative Rehabilitation After Surgical Decompression of the Lumbar Spine.](#) Mannion AF, Denzler R, Dvorak J, Müntener M, Grob D. European Spine Journal : Official Publication of the European Spine Society, the European Spinal Deformity Society, and the European Section of the Cervical Spine Research Society. 2007;16(8):1101-17. doi:10.1007/s00586-007-0399-6.
4. [Practical Answers to Frequently Asked Questions in Minimally Invasive Lumbar Spine Surgery.](#) Shahi P, Vaishnav AS, Mai E, et al. The Spine Journal : Official Journal of the North American Spine Society. 2023;23(1):54-63. doi:10.1016/j.spinee.2022.07.087.
5. [Recovery Kinetics After Commonly Performed Minimally Invasive Spine Surgery Procedures.](#) Shinn D, Mok JK, Vaishnav AS, et al. Spine. 2022;47(21):1489-1496. doi:10.1097/BRS.0000000000004399.

6. [Interventions for the Management of Acute and Chronic Low Back Pain: Revision 2021.](#) George SZ, Fritz JM, Silfies SP, et al. The Journal of Orthopaedic and Sports Physical Therapy. 2021;51(11):CPG1-CPG60. doi:10.2519/jospt.2021.0304.
7. [Postoperative Physical Therapy Program Focused on Low Back Pain Can Improve Treatment Satisfaction After Minimally Invasive Lumbar Decompression.](#) Terai H, Tamai K, Kaneda K, et al. Journal of Clinical Medicine. 2022;11(19):5566. doi:10.3390/jcm11195566.
8. [The Effect of Exercise Interventions After Lumbar Decompression Surgery: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis.](#) Özden F. World Neurosurgery. 2022;167:e904-e921. doi:10.1016/j.wneu.2022.08.103.
9. [Postoperative Functional Exercise for Patients Who Underwent Percutaneous Transforaminal Endoscopic Discectomy for Lumbar Disc Herniation.](#) Zhang R, Zhang SJ, Wang XJ. European Review for Medical and Pharmacological Sciences. 2018;22(1 Suppl):15-22. doi:10.26355/eurev_201807_15354.