

Spinal Decompression Discharge Instructions

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

Activity Guidelines

Walking and Movement

- Start walking the day after surgery and gradually increase your walking time each day[\[1\]](#)
- Walking is one of the best activities for your recovery - aim to walk several times throughout the day
- You may climb stairs, but take your time and use the handrail
- Listen to your body and rest when you feel tired

Lifting Restrictions

- **Do not lift more than 10 pounds for 4 to 6 weeks** after surgery (10 pounds is about the weight of a gallon of milk)
- Avoid repetitive bending, lifting, and twisting motions during this time
- When you need to pick something up, bend at your knees instead of your waist
- Ask for help with heavy objects, grocery bags, laundry baskets, and pets

Returning to Activities

- Most patients can return to light activities and desk work within 2-4 weeks[\[2\]](#)
- You may resume driving when you are no longer taking narcotic pain medications and can comfortably turn your head and body (typically 1-2 weeks)[\[2\]](#)
- Gradually increase your activity level as tolerated
- Avoid high-impact activities, contact sports, and heavy lifting until cleared by your surgeon

Wound Care

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)

If You Have Skin Glue:

- 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

If You Have Sutures or Staples:

- Your incision is closed with sutures (stitches) or staples
- Keep the area clean and dry between showers
- Do not apply any ointments or creams to the incision unless your surgeon tells you to
- Your sutures or staples will be removed at your follow-up appointment (usually around 2 weeks after surgery)
- It is normal to see some bruising or swelling around the incision

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
- Difficulty urinating or loss of bowel/bladder control

Pain Management

- Some pain and discomfort after surgery is normal and expected
- Take your pain medications as prescribed
- 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[\[2\]](#)

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

Exercise and Rehabilitation

- Gentle movement and staying active are important for your recovery[\[3\]](#)[\[4\]](#)
- Your surgeon may recommend physical therapy or a home exercise program
- Most patients see continued improvement in pain and function over the first 3-6 months after surgery[\[2\]](#)[\[5\]](#)

Important Reminders

- Keep all follow-up appointments with your surgeon
- Do not smoke - smoking slows healing and increases complication risk
- Maintain a healthy diet and stay well-hydrated

- Get plenty of rest, but avoid staying in bed all day
- Gradually return to your normal routine as you feel able

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

References

1. [Physical Activity Patterns of Patients Immediately After Lumbar Surgery](#). Gilmore SJ, Hahne AJ, Davidson M, McClelland JA. Disability and Rehabilitation. 2020;42(26):3793-3799. doi:10.1080/09638288.2019.1610512.
2. [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.
3. [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.
4. [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.
5. [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.