

# CERVICAL FUSION: POST OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS

Your surgery involves putting two or more separate vertebral bodies (spinal bodies) together. This is done by fixing the bones with metal and plastic implants that are connected to each other. We place graft between the bones to encourage them to heal together along that path.

When your surgery is complete, your vertebrae will be fixed together, but the healing process to get them to fuse together takes over a year. Remember that internally, you are not healed until at least twelve months after the surgery. Skin and muscle heal quickly while bone healing takes much longer. For that reason, you must protect your surgical area and keep the stress on the implants to a minimum. You also must have good quality nutrition and stay away from medications that slow bone healing. Poorly controlled medical problems and exposure to tobacco can also significantly limit your body's ability to heal bone.

**With this in mind, please follow the instructions below to the best of your ability.**

## **Before Surgery:**

- 1) Make sure you **do NOT** take any anti-inflammatory medications\* or blood thinners for the **7 days prior** to your surgery date. If you are taking blood thinners, please contact the prescribing doctor before quitting the medication.
- 2) **Men, please shave** your neck prior to arriving at the hospital for surgery.
- 3) After surgery, you may have to choose to go home, to inpatient rehabilitation, or to another inpatient facility, such as skilled nursing. **Please discuss these options** with your family before surgery. Also inform your hospital nurses after surgery so that you may have a smooth transition when leaving the hospital.
- 4) **If you have NOT already had your first post-operative appointment scheduled**, please call the office and schedule your first post-operative appointment. It should be 10-14 days after your surgery.

## **Immediately after surgery:**

- 1) **Keep your bandage on until your first visit with us, 10-14 days after your surgery.** It was placed in the operating room when your surgical area was clean. This bandage keeps any moisture and debris out of the surgical area and assists in preventing infection.
- 2) **Sponge-bathe only.** If the bandage starts to come off, you can reinforce the edges with paper tape. If it is peeling off more than that, **call us** and protect the incisions with dry gauze and paper tape.
- 3) **No driving** until after your first post-op appointment.
- 4) **You may experience difficulty swallowing and/or voice changes.** These are a normal result of your trachea and esophagus being moved during anterior (front) surgery. The chance of these symptoms occurring increases with longer, more extensive surgeries. We recommend thick liquids such as thickened water or protein shakes and foods such as yogurt, mashed potatoes, and blended soups.

## **For three (3) months after surgery:**

- 1) **Please try to walk upright.** If needed, feel free to **use a soft cervical foam collar or brace.** It is **very important for you to avoid falls and stumbles.** Your implants are designed to support you the best while in an upright position.
- 2) **Limit the amount of bending, twisting, and lifting (>25 lbs.) that you do.** In the three (3) months, when your muscle is weak and recovering, a lot of that stress will be transferred to your implants. It is

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in your best interest to not overwork yourself. This will allow your implants to be stable in the bone for as long as possible and give your bone as much time as it needs to heal.

- 3) **Avoid and stay away from any use of Power Tools, Power Equipment, ATV's, Lawn Mowers, Tractors, and Guns.** These types of equipment increase the risk for accidents after surgery. Additionally, these types of equipment have micro-vibrations that can cause the implants from your surgery to loosen over a short period of time.
- 4) **Please do NOT do any type of physical therapy, unless you have called us and we have specifically approved it.** Please inform other providers of this. **There is NO physical therapy for a minimum of three (3) months.** Your only exercise should be walking upright, with as much support from a cane or walker as you need. You can walk at a brisk pace if you would like. Sitting for long periods is ok as long as it does not make you too uncomfortable. You do NOT want to prematurely stress and loosen the implants. Once your muscles recover, the load on your implants is much less.
- 5) **Avoid use of anti-inflammatory medications\*.** The first stage of bone healing is inflammation; you do not want to prevent this healing. **Three (3) months** after your surgery, you can resume all NSAIDS. Please inform other providers of this and do NOT take any NSAIDS from anyone unless you have called us and we have approved it.
- 6) **Avoid use of anti-osteoporosis agents** (Fosamax, Boniva, Actonel, and Evista). The first stage of bone healing is inflammation; you do not want to prevent this healing. **Six (6) months after your surgery, you can resume all anti-osteoporosis medications.** Please inform other providers of this and do NOT take any anti-osteoporosis medications from anyone unless you have called us and we have approved it.
- 7) **Constipation** after surgery is very common. Narcotic medications can increase constipation. Use any standard **over the counter laxative** and try to stop the use of narcotic medication if possible.
- 8) Wear your shirt **loose**, so that it does not rub the incision area.
- 9) It is important that you get **GOOD NUTRITION** after surgery to help with the healing of your incisions and the bone. Make sure you take a **multivitamin, iron and calcium** after your surgery. You may not have much of an appetite, but it is very important that you get good nutrition. You may want to drink a **nutritional supplement like Boost or Ensure.**
- 10) **For diabetics, maintain excellent control of your blood sugar.** This will help you avoid infections and improve the chance of successful bone healing.
- 11) **If possible, STOP SMOKING** and stay away from smokers. **Heavy smoke exposure severely limits your ability to heal bone.**
- 12) If you need post-operative pain medications and you do NOT have an established pain management physician, it is likely that we will be providing you with post-operative pain medications. Confirm that your medication is sent to your pharmacy before surgery. **Please take your post-operative medication as directed on the bottle. If you feel that the medication is not helping enough or you need a refill, please call our office.**

Remember, you have just had a significant amount of surgery that will require healing. Try your best to stay away from strenuous or dangerous activity and call us if you have any questions. These instructions should answer any of the questions you may have regarding your post-operative instructions or concerns. If you have additional questions, please call our office. Thanks, and we wish you Happy Healing,

### **Brazos Spine**

**\*Examples of Anti-inflammatories**— NSAIDS: Advil, Ibuprofen, Aleve, Motrin, Mobic (Meloxicam), Celebrex (celecoxib), and also Steroid Medications: Prednisone, Celestone, Cortisone, Medrol Dose Paks, Toradol (Ketorolac), etc.