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Orthopaedic Spine Surgery

Lumbar Fusion

What can I expect for recovery time?

“Recovery time” is specific to every patient and their lifestyle and therefore means something different to every patient. Everyone progresses differently in terms of returning to “regular” activities after surgery. In general, it may take 4-6 weeks before you feel ready to resume regular activities and up to 6-12 months before healing is complete.

Do I have sutures and when do they come out?

You have dissolvable sutures that do not need to be removed.

How long do I need a dressing for and how often should I change the dressing?

You should continue with daily dressing changes until your first shower on post-operative day #5. At that point, you will remove the current dressing to shower and no further dressings will be needed. Do not put ointments/creams/lotions on the incision.

When do I wear the brace and for how long will I need it?

If given a brace, you should wear it anytime you are out of bed. You may take it off for hygiene purposes. You may be asked to wear for up to 12 weeks post-op. Your physician will instruct you during the post-op visits regarding further brace use.

When do I use the bone stimulator and for how long will I need it?

If given a bone stimulator, instructions should have been taught to you upon its receipt. If you have questions regarding its proper usage, please contact the company for assistance and a representative will be able to make a site visit to go over any issues with you. Our office can give you this information and assist in this process if necessary.

When can I shower and can the incision get wet?

For the first week, we ask that you keep the incision dry and not shower, but sponge bathe instead. At 5 days after surgery, you may remove the current dressing, begin showering lightly over the incision, pat the incision dry when done, and leave it open to air (with no further dressings). The steri-strips will fall off on their own, do not actively remove them. Do not soak the incision (ie. sit in a bath, pool, or spa).

How long should I continue with pain medication?

Pain medication is for you to take AS NEEDED for moderate-severe pain. Every patient experiences pain differently, but on average, you should begin to wean from narcotic pain medication by 2-4 weeks post-op. Extra-strength acetaminophen (Tylenol) is effective in relieving less severe pain. Do NOT take anti-inflammatory medications until instructed that it is safe.

Are there exercises or physical therapy I need to do? How soon? How often?

The only exercise we recommend during the immediate post-op period is walking. You will begin walking the day after surgery. Walk as much as possible, gradually increasing the distance each day. Your goal should be to walk up to a mile a day by 4 weeks post-op. Future need for physical therapy will be addressed at your post-op visits.

When can I drive?

Approximately 4 weeks post-op. You will need to have good control over your legs and be off of prescription pain medication as well.

What is the average time I will be off work?

On average, desk work → 3-6 weeks and heavy work → 12-20 weeks. Some patients may return to work sooner than others depending on their response to surgery and ability to temporarily perform lighter tasks in the work place. Physician approval is required prior to returning to work.

How much can I lift?

No more than 10 pounds during the first 6 weeks post-op.

What activities should I avoid?

Use common sense but you should avoid sitting for long periods of time (more than 30 minutes at a time) and anything requiring aggressive bending, lifting, or twisting (BLT).

When can I have sex after surgery?

Sexual activity can be resumed when you feel comfortable. Use common sense and proper body mechanics to protect your back.

Should I use heat or ice on my back?

Heat and ice can be used for comfort, but are not necessary for recovery. When using, be cognizant of incision care.

How long do I need to continue wearing the TED (leg) stockings?

TED (leg) stockings can be discontinued once you are out of bed and walking frequently.

When do I follow up with my surgeon?

1st f/u: approximately 2 weeks post-op

2nd f/u: approximately 6 weeks post-op

3rd f/u: approximately 12 weeks post-op

4th f/u: approximately 6 months post-op

5th f/u: approximately 12 months post-op