



THE CAMALIER BUILDING, SUITE 303 • 10215 FERNWOOD ROAD • BETHESDA, MD 20817 • TEL (240) 482-2438 • FAX (301) 530-3030

General Information on Cervical Fusion

Expectations: It is important to remember that recovery time frames following a spinal fusion surgery can vary. It is often dependent on age, and prior activity levels before surgery. In some cases, it can last several months. There are also scenarios where patients report this process taking over a year. The information provided is designed to help you optimize your recovery process, and to maximize the odds of a successful outcome.

Walking: It is very important to progress walking as early as possible following your surgery to improve your overall fitness, and to minimize complication risks. Once you are discharged, aim to walk 10-20 minutes per day. If this is tolerable for you, increase your walking time to 20-30 minutes 2-3 days later. If the initial walking time is too easy, it is also appropriate to progress walking times by 10 minutes per day. Progress to walking at least 1-2 miles per day. You may have other orthopedic issues that limit you from walking this distance. Please discuss with your therapist specifics on walking distances.

Use of Ice and heat: With the exception of warm water in the shower, heat should not be applied to the surgical area for at least two weeks following surgery to allow for the acute inflammatory phase to subside. It may be used as needed after that time. Please use caution to avoid skin burns. Ice may be applied during this initial stage to manage inflammation up to 5 times per day. Various ice options are acceptable. These include gel packs, frozen peas, or a bag of ice. It is recommended that you use a towel to add an additional layer between the ice and your skin to prevent skin damage. Do not apply ice for more than 15-20 minutes, and allow at least one hour in between icing sessions to allow for adequate circulation to the area. In the early stages, it is recommended to do this in sitting position with erect posture.

Home preparation: It is normal to feel physically tired upon returning home from spinal surgery. Before your operation, arrange your home to allow for consolidation of items that are of importance to you (water, layers of clothing, tissues, work items etc.) Some patients find it useful to set up a “recovery station” at various points in their homes to accomplish this. This will limit the distances required to walk inside your home. Wear clothing with multiple pockets to allow your hands to be free for use. You may want to consider obtaining adaptive equipment such as a grabber, or shoe horn to assist with day to day activity. Check your home setting beforehand, and remove items from the floors as much as possible to minimize tripping hazards. Non-skid mats are extremely useful for this as well. Notify loved ones of your surgery beforehand. If possible, seek their assistance upon your return home for the initial days with various tasks such as shopping, meal preparation, and performing of laundry.

Sleep: Many patients experience difficulty sleeping after spinal surgery due to pain. To help allow for adequate rest and recovery, please consider the following:

- Avoid caffeine during the afternoon hours.
- Minimize naps during the day.
- Avoid heavy meals prior to sleeping.
- Minimize screen time in front of the TV, or computer before sleeping.
- Listen to calming, or soothing music prior to sleeping.



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Getting into and out of bed: When getting into and out of bed, remember to do so using the log roll. (Roll onto your side). When getting out of bed, assume this position first. At that point dangle your feet over the edge of the bed before sitting upright. This is extremely important to minimize twisting forces on your spine. Speak with your therapist if you need further guidance on correct completion of log rolling. Exercise sheets are also available with visual diagrams that provide details on this movement.

What to bring to the hospital: Please plan to bring a change of clothes including a bathrobe, toiletries, as well as comfortable footwear. Non-skid slippers are very useful due to restricted motion following surgery. It is recommended that valuables, such as jewelry, or cash are left at home. Avoid bringing, or wearing perfumes or colognes as well.

Other information for before surgery: If you develop any symptoms consistent with feeling ill, including a cough, fever, or nausea within 5 days of surgery, contact physician immediately.