

Lumbar Fusion Surgery Post-Operative Instructions

- Avoid any bending or twisting of your spine for at least 6 weeks unless your surgeon instructs you otherwise. For daily activities including washing, dressing, or donning shoes, practice doing so by bending the knees and hips.
- If you must lift light weights, make sure you bend and lift with your legs and avoid movement of your spine.
- Support the low back, at least with a soft pillow, whenever you sit. Make sure that you maintain slight pressure against your back when sitting.
- Practice the basic stabilization exercises, a few repetitions at a time, several times a day. Remember, you are reprogramming the muscles to work with the new mechanics of the fusion. Some of the vertebrae in your low back that used to move are now in a fixed position. You want to do everything you can to let them heal in a good position (by learning to hold a good neutral spine) and to allow the muscles to start working as soon as possible in their new jobs.
- Don't lift more than 15 pounds until you are told otherwise after your six week checkup. You will still have a lifting limit for a while after that, although you may be allowed to increase it some.
- Be constantly aware of your posture. Your head needs to be right over your shoulders, shoulders back, and abdomen tight. Wear your brace if instructed by your surgeon.
- It is best to avoid sex the first two weeks, or if pain increases significantly after the surgery. Once you resume sex, you still must observe the lifting and bending restrictions listed above and wear your brace. Side lying is the safest approach.
- Preferred sleeping positions: on your side with knees bent and a pillow between them, or on your back with pillows under your knees. Some patients obtain relief from wearing a brace at night, loosened slightly.
- Deep breathing, with effort to expand and contract the ribcage as much as possible is helpful for many systems in the body, but also can work the vertebrae in the mid back and reduce the tension on the back.
- Whenever you get up from lying down, *always* log roll to your side first. Slide your legs to the side of the bed and drop your feet over, sitting up from your side.
- The back muscles will tend to tighten and at times the low back will flatten. It is very important to maintain a slight arch in your back to help reduce the pressure on the lower vertebrae. You will also have to retrain your abdominal muscles and back muscles. Your therapists will go over this with you and then you should *practice* several times a day. If you have trouble tolerating upright position (either sitting or standing) you may need a brace.
- The "wall squat" exercise is safe to begin at any time and can be done in or out of your brace. It's a very effective lower body strengthener that will also help you get up and down from sitting and from the floor. It is important the therapist watch you do this the first time to make sure you are doing it safely. Note: it is very important that your knees do not go in front of your feet and that your hips stay above the knees.
- Speak with your physician regarding medication usage.
- Your physician will determine when you start outpatient physical therapy. This will be on an individual basis. A common start date is six weeks following surgery.