



# LUMBAR SURGERY

## Post-operative instructions

### What has happened?

You have undergone an operation to decompress an area of your lumbar spine that is being affected by a herniated disc, bone spur caused by osteoarthritis. Please remember pain is completely normal following an operation as your body is recuperating.

### What to do now:

- Be mobile! You can get up and move almost immediately, you can go to the toilet in the afternoon or evening following your surgery.
- You are allowed home as soon as you are mobile, usually within a day or two of the surgery. It is completely normal to feel discomfort at the site around your wound. This can be controlled with standard painkillers such as paracetamol. This will settle over the following few days.
- In the weeks following the operation it is ideal to keep moving as regularly as possible. You may find that sitting can be uncomfortable, therefore it is recommended to alternate between lying flat, standing and walking. Just remember that any position that you are in for too long will be uncomfortable. The best thing is to change position regularly and activity can help to reduce discomfort.

### Managing at home:

- You can return to normal household duties as you feel able, however consider pacing principles especially for tasks such as vacuuming, ironing or preparing meals.
- Carry shopping items in smaller bags and use a shallow trolley rather than a deep one when shopping.
- You may find it easier to get dressed while perched on the edge of your bed or chair. Slip on shoes with good grip may be an easy option especially during the first few days.
- The most comfortable sleeping positions are on your back with knees bent and a pillow underneath your knees, or on your side with your knees bent and a pillow between your legs.
- Sit in chairs that provide you with good back support and avoid low chairs or soft couches where your hips drop below your knees.
- It is recommended to avoid baths, especially for the first two weeks or until your incision is completely healed. Showering is okay.
- Driving is possible within a few days post-op, once you have ceased your opioid medications. You will feel uncomfortable in a seated position so limit your driving to short distances for the initial two-three weeks. After which your comfortable seating time will gradually increase.

### Wound Care:

- It is important to keep your dressings clean, dry and intact until review with our practice nurse.
- Your dressings are water resistant but not water proof.
- Remove soaked or soiled dressings and notify our practice with any concerns.
- Do not swim, soak or submerge the area in water until your incision has completely healed.

## **Exercise:**

- Exercise is encouraged as soon as possible. Use the principles of pacing to judge where to start, then build.
- You can begin walking from day one. It is encouraged that you walk as much as possible from 15-30 minutes per day beginning with a slow comfortable pace and gradually working up to a brisk pace as tolerated.
- Swimming is also another excellent form of exercise and can commence once your incision is completely healed.
- Bike riding, including stationary bike in the gym or road bike on flat surfaces, can also commence once the dressing has come off. Begin on low resistance for short durations and build up gradually as tolerated.
- More vigorous exercise can be undertaken after three-six months.
- After lumbar surgery you may be recommended to see your local physiotherapist for an individualized rehabilitation program to assist you in your recovery and return to activities of daily living, work or sport.
- Sexual activity can be carried out as soon as comfortable.

## **Getting back to work:**

- It is encouraged to return to work as soon as you are comfortable. As a rule of thumb, you can return to sedentary-type work as early as two weeks, and heavy manual work after four-six weeks post-surgery.
- Modifying your work station may be require to ensure good ergonomic setup for correct posture. Regular breaks to allow standing, or an actual standing work station is recommended.
- The structure of the spine is strong enough to lift after the operation, however the issue is whether you are fit enough. Most people will find they need to practice lifting to improve their tolerance. Therefore, it is recommended you begin with day-to-day items (ie kettle, milk carton) and gradually increase as comfortable.
- For jobs involving heavy lifting, regular bending or twisting, correct lifting techniques are strongly advised. If you are unsure please speak with our nurse or book in with your physiotherapist for advice.

## **Getting back to normal:**

- It is normal to have good and bad days. Just remember to pace your return to activities by doing things slowly at first and a little bit at a time, then gradually build up from here each day.
- Within two months you should be doing most things fairly normally.
- Strenuous activities return more slowly.
- You do not need to avoid lifting altogether, just be sensible and remember that heavier lifting will be tolerable in time.
- You will find it easier to bend at your hips and knees, rather than from your back.
- Your confidence in your back will continue to improve as you get back to most of your basic activities and movement within the first few weeks.

- These guidelines were produced in collaboration with