



Discharge Instructions

What to Expect After Cervical Fusion

Incision Care

- You may shower 72 hours after you have been discharged from the hospital unless otherwise stated by Dr. Valente. Please do not take any tub baths. You cannot soak the wound or it could get infected. You may allow the soap and water to gently run over the wound, but do not scrub at it, or it may cause the incision to come open.
- After you shower, place a clean dry dressing over the wound with gauze and paper tape once daily. Please do NOT apply any type of ointment on the wound.
- Change the dressings once daily with gauze and paper tape. If you have a drain in make sure when you change the bandages to not accidentally pull the drain out. The drain should be pulled out at 72 hours after surgery.
- Please contact the office at 972-707-0005 if you notice: **INCISION OPENING, EXCESSIVE DRAINAGE THAT IS BLOOD or PUS OR GREEN OR YELLOW IN COLOR, OR HAS A FOUL ODOR!**

Drain Removal

- Remove the drain 72 hours after surgery. Use a scissors to cut the small black suture, then pull on the clear drain tube and the tube will slide right out.
- If the drain fills up before you have to remove it at 72 hours, open the top of the drain on the bulb and press on the bulb to empty the bulb into a sink or toilet. After the bulb is emptied, keep pressing on the bulb and then close the cap so that the negative pressure stays in the bulb to facilitate drainage.
- **IF THE DRAIN FILLS UP IN LESS THAN 1 HOUR FROM IT BEING EMPTIED, THEN GO IMMEDIATELY TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM OR CALL 911.**

Activities

- Do not make important decisions or sign legal documents for the first 24 hours after surgery. Anesthesia and pain medications will have been given to you and this could affect your decision making as compared to before surgery.



- For the first night after surgery, sleep with head and shoulders elevated to 60 degrees, in order to prevent postoperative complications.
- **DO NOT DRIVE OR OPERATE** hazardous machinery until you have full range of motion of upper extremities and neck, **ARE NOT TAKING PAIN MEDICATION OR MUSCLE RELAXANTS**, and when **NO LONGER** wearing neck brace. If you are driving with a neck brace and get pulled over, you WILL get a ticket!
- **DO NOT** engage in sports until told otherwise especially strenuous activities, excessive twisting, bending, or straining of your neck for approximately 12 weeks or longer. Dr. Valente will let you know when you have been released from these restrictions. Every patient is different.
- You must wear your neck brace at all times, including when you sleep and eat. However, you may remove the neck brace when showering. After showering, pat the incision dry and place a clean dry dressing then place your brace back on. Patients that wear their brace as directed recover faster!
- The neck brace needs to be worn for 4-6 weeks after surgery.
- **DO NOT LIFT** more than 5-10 lbs in the first 3 months, unless told differently by Dr. Valente.
- **NO SMOKING!** This can stop the bones from healing and lead to very poor outcomes from surgery.

Diet

- You will be started first on ice chips after surgery, than advanced to clear fluids, and then soft foods and then eventually be able to get back on a regular diet.
- Anticipate difficulty eating/swallowing due to some swelling after neck surgery. It is often more difficult to swallow liquids, like water, than it is to swallow foods with more consistency such as puddings or yogurt. Everyone experiences difficulty eating/swallowing after anterior neck surgeries but this typically resolves in a few days or weeks.
- If you have **DIFFICULTY BREATHING, CALL 9-1-1** and then notify us at 972-707-0005. Do not try and drive yourself to ER, it is safer to call 9-1-1 so the EMS can help you while you are being transported to the hospital. This is very rare, but you must be aware of this possible complication while in your early recovery phase.
- Make sure to include a multivitamin in your daily diet. Also increasing protein helps with healing. If you have kidney disease, discuss your diet with your nephrologist.



- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated and not become constipated. Pain medications and muscle relaxants slow the bowel down and can cause constipation. You will be given a stool softener while in the hospital, but have some available at home if needed. If you do not have a bowel movement within a couple of days after getting home, contact us and your primary doctor to see what you should do to relieve your constipation. Prune and pear juice are helpful.

Medications

- Take your prescription medications as directed. **DO NOT INCREASE YOUR DOSE** unless told it is okay by a physician! In the unlikely event you have an allergic reaction to a medication, seek medical attention **IMMEDIATELY!** Symptoms of an allergic reaction include rash, hives, itching, facial swelling, tongue or eyelid swelling, and/or difficulty breathing.
- **DO NOT OPERATE** machinery while taking narcotics or muscle relaxants. These include NORCO, HYDROCODONE, VICODIN, OXYCONTIN, ZANAFLEX, FLEXERIL, ROBAXIN, etc.
- Alcoholic beverages or other sedatives may add to the effects of these medications and can be **VERY** dangerous.
- Side effects include constipation, lightheadedness, dizziness, drowsiness, stomach upset, nausea, and flushing the first few days as your body adjusts to these medications. If these symptoms persist or become bothersome, call the office to notify our staff.
- To prevent an upset stomach, take medications with food or milk unless the pharmacist states otherwise.
- **DO NOT TAKE ANY ANTI-INFLAMMATORIES** 1 week prior to surgery and for 3 MONTHS after surgery. Some examples of common anti-inflammatories are **motrin, ibuprofen, alleve, aspirin, naprosyn, naproxen, mobic, and meloxicam**. If you are unsure if one of your medications are an anti-inflammatory call our office or ask Dr. Valente. Taking anti-inflammatories before surgery can cause life threatening bleeding during surgery or paralysis from bleeding into the spinal canal. In the first few days after surgery anti-inflammatories can also cause bleeding into the spinal canal. In the first few months after surgery anti-inflammatories may inhibit the bones from fusing. The only exception to this is if you are taking aspirin for your heart. In this case, you should still stop taking the aspirin 1 week prior to surgery but you may restart taking it 1 week after surgery.



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- DO NOT TAKE **ASPIRIN** 1 week before surgery and 1 week after surgery. Please discuss this with your PCP and cardiologist prior to surgery so they are aware. If they want you to take it within the 1 week before or 1 week after surgery then Dr. Valente needs to be notified so he and your PCP or cardiologist can weigh the risks/benefits of being off the medication versus the risks/benefits of taking it in the immediate peri-operative period. Aspirin can cause life threatening bleeding and/or paralysis with spinal surgery. Do not make your own decision to take it or come off of it without consulting Dr. Valente, your Cardiologist or PCP.

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7712 San Jacinto Place
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Pain

- Pain is expected after surgery. However, the pain medications prescribed to you should make the pain tolerable.
- You may still have numbness and tingling in your arms, but this can gradually decrease as your nerves and muscles heal.
- Ice pack may be applied to help reduce swelling and pain. Skin should be protected from a “cold burn” by using a cloth between the ice and skin. The ice pack should not be applied for more than 20 minutes at a time.

Follow-up Appointment

- We will see you in the clinic 2 weeks from the date of your surgery or sooner if needed. Call us at 972-707-0005 to schedule an appointment if you do not already have one. Expect to have x-rays taken so arrive 15 minutes early for your appointment.

Notify your physician if:

- **You have a fever >101.1 or greater. A low grade temperature off 99-100 is normal for the first couple of days after surgery.**
- **You develop loss of bowel or bladder control!**
- **You have excruciating pain/weakness/numbness in arms or even legs**
- **Develop new symptoms**

Contact us with any questions or concerns! We want you to have a good recovery!

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