

Comprehensive Spine Care, P.A.

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Post Cervical Foraminotomy/Discectomy Instructions

You are probably wondering what to expect in the next few weeks following your neck surgery. This information will help guide you through your upcoming recovery period. Below you will find clear and simple answers to most of your questions, though you should always feel free to call the office with any questions or concerns.

Was my surgery successful?

The ultimate success of the surgery depends on the improvement of your symptoms over time. You may have already noticed a reduction in your arm pain and/or numbness, and if you had arm weakness before the surgery, you may have started feeling stronger already. If you cannot appreciate any difference in your arm symptoms, do not be discouraged. This usually means that the nerve is still inflamed. The majority of patients (90%) continue to gradually improve over the course of weeks and months after their surgery.

How long will the surgical pain last?

The neck pain from your surgical incision should gradually improve over the next few days to the point where you may not require narcotic pain medications such as Percocet or Vicodin within 2 weeks. Occasionally, you may feel spasms in the back of your neck or episodes of shooting pain down the arm. These episodes are not uncommon in the first couple of weeks after the surgery, particularly as you increase your activities. The shooting pain usually represents irritability of the nerve which was un-pinched during the surgery. These episodes are expected to diminish in frequency and intensity over time.

How should I control the pain?

Prior to the surgery you were given a prescription for a strong pain killer such as Percocet or Vicodin. Take the pain killer as instructed on an as-needed-basis to control the pain particularly when you are out of bed. Remember that it takes time for the medication to kick-in so take it when you start feeling the pain intensifying and do not wait until the pain is extremely severe. Pain killers will often constipate you so drink lots of fluid and add a stool softener (such as Colace 100mg twice a day) if needed. Stool softeners can be obtained from any pharmacy over-the-counter. You should avoid driving or operating heavy machinery while taking these strong pain killers.

When should I wear the cervical collar?

You will be wearing a soft cervical collar after the surgery. The collar serves to protect your neck by restricting your movement. It also provides you with comfort and support after the surgery. You should wear the collar continuously except for when you shower and until your follow up visit. Most patients are not required to wear the collar for longer than 2 weeks after their surgery.

Do I have stitches that need to be removed? How do I change the dressing? When can I shower and get the wound wet?

Usually, all of the sutures are under your skin and will dissolve on their own over time. You may have a loop of suture sticking out on each end of the incision. These loops will be removed during your follow up visit. In some instances you may have skin staples instead of sutures. Either way, you may start showering the day you get home but try and avoid having the shower spray directly on your incision for the first 3 days following the surgery. Leave the original bandage on your neck for these first 3 days. If you notice drainage on your bandage, please remove the outer adhesive and dressing on the incision as needed. Leave the strips of tape that are directly on your skin alone until your first office visit. If you have staples, place a new gauze over the staples to avoid irritation from your cervical collar.

What activities am I allowed to do at home?

You are encouraged to get out of bed and walk on a regular basis. In general it is better to be moving around while taking pain medications as needed rather than lying in bed most of the day to avoid discomfort. You should use your judgment as to when to rest and avoid over-doing it in the first few days after surgery.

What are my restrictions?

In general, you should avoid any strenuous activity for the next 4 weeks. In particular, you are advised to avoid:

- lifting more than 5-10 lbs.
- repetitive bending or twisting.
- any activity that reproduces significant neck or arm discomfort.

What about driving?

We recommend that you avoid driving until your first follow-up visit, particularly if you are taking strong pain medications such as Percocet or Vicodin. You should arrange for a person to drive you to your first post operative visit.

What symptoms should I inform the surgeon about?

Signs of surgical wound infection (occurs in about 1 of every 100 patients):

- Your surgical wound becomes more rather than less painful over time.
- The wound appears swollen, red, or feels warm and tender to touch.
- The wound drains a yellow- greenish discharge or continues to drain any fluid for longer than 4 days after the surgery
- You have an elevated temperature > 100.5 two-three days after the surgery.

Other problems:

- You start feeling worsening arm pain, numbness, or weakness.
- You notice problems with your legs including weakness, imbalance, and difficulty walking.
- You are unable to urinate or have lost urinary or bowel control. This does not mean constipation, which was discussed above.

When is my follow-up appointment?

Your follow-up appointment has already been scheduled. If you are not certain of the date and time, please contact our office (201 634-1811) to find out.

We are looking forward to seeing you soon and wish you a smooth and speedy recovery.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of these instructions on the date listed below:

Patient Name: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____