

Anterior Cervical Decompression and Fusion Day Surgery Unit



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Information for Patients and Families After Day Surgery

Krembil Neuroscience Program

Patients and families: what to watch for

- You have had a general anesthetic. **DO NOT** drive a car or drink alcohol for 24 hours.
- A hematoma (or blood clot) around the area where you had surgery is an uncommon complication that can happen after anterior cervical surgery. It can cause difficulty swallowing or breathing. **If you experience this, it is an emergency situation and may have possible severe or serious complications.**

It is important for you and your family to know what symptoms to watch for, and what to do if you think you might have a hematoma.

Watch for these symptoms on the night of the surgery or the first 24 hours:

- increasing difficulty breathing
- increasing shortness of breath
- increasing difficulty swallowing
- hoarse voice that is getting worse
- excessive sweating
- swelling and/or feel pain on the front of your neck

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***Acknowledgement to Bruna Curtis, RN from Day Surgery Unit and Kim Duncan for providing valuable feedback during the revision of the booklet.**

Created: 04/2004

Form: D-3385 (08/2010)



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If you have any of these symptoms, call **Toronto Western Hospital at (416) 340-3155** and ask for the **Neurosurgeon on Call**. Tell the operator (and the Neurosurgeon on Call) that you just had Anterior Cervical Decompression and Fusion surgery and that you have just been discharged from the Day Surgery Unit.

If you are not able to contact the Neurosurgeon on Call and your symptom(s) continue or get worse, call 911 and go to the Emergency Department immediately.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. What can I eat and drink after my operation?

- You may not feel hungry after your surgery. A large meal may not settle well in your stomach. You may also have a sore throat or some discomfort when you swallow for several weeks. Try eating small meals often until you can eat what you normally would.
- If you can, try to eat different kinds of solid food that are easy to chew. For example, start with soft food such as yogurt, Jello, ice cream, mashed potato, pudding, clear soup and minced foods.
- Drink fluids such as water, tea, coffee, apple juice and orange juice. (Mix orange juice with some water to make it less acidic or sour so it does not irritate your throat.)
- If you feel nauseous (sick to your stomach) or you are vomiting, take anti-nausea medication such as Gravol[®], which you can buy from your pharmacy without a prescription. Follow the instructions on the box and continue drinking fluids until your nausea passes. Then gradually return to eating solid food.

Q. Do I need to wear a collar after my operation?

- No, you will not need to wear a neck collar after this surgery.

Q. Can I shower normally?

- Wait 3 days after your surgery to take a shower.

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- Cover the incision (surgical cut) with plastic wrap before taking a shower to keep it dry.
- After you shower, gently pat dry the incision with a clean towel.
- You can shampoo your hair while in the shower.
- For the first 4 weeks, do not soak your incision in water.
- Do not go swimming until your surgeon says it is safe to do so.

Q. Am I able to lift anything?

- Avoid heavy lifting over 10 pounds or 5 kilograms.
- Use good body mechanics when turning, bending and picking up objects.
- Avoid twisting your neck.
- Avoid tiring activities such as gardening, jogging, skiing, golfing or shoveling snow, until you see your neurosurgeon at your follow up visit.

Q. When can I drive?

- You may drive a car 2 days to 1 week after your surgery, if your condition gets better.
- Fix your seat and headrest so that you are in a comfortable position.
- Drive for short distances at first, then increase the distance if you can.

Q. Am I okay to walk?

- You will be walking within hours of your surgery, so keep walking when you are at home. The day after your surgery, you can return to your normal light activities.
- Walking is very good for you. A daily walk will help you feel better and stronger.
- Take lots of breaks when you walk and remember to pace yourself.
- Your neurosurgeon will give you a written Physiotherapy Referral Form on the day of your surgery or when you come for your first follow up visit at the clinic. The prescribed physiotherapy will help strengthen, stretch and condition your neck and limb muscles.

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- You can go to a Physiotherapy centre near your home or you can ask your family doctor to refer you to a Physiotherapy centre.

Q. When can I return to work and sports?

- Your surgeon will tell you when it is safe to go back to work and play sports.

Q. How do I take care of my incision and dressing?

- Keep your incision and dressing clean and dry at all times to help the healing process.
- You will have steri-strips (small white tapes) covering your incision. Leave them in place for 7-10 days, and then remove them. If they begin to fall off earlier, remove them and throw them away.
- Keep your incision covered with a dressing for the first 3 days. After that, leave it uncovered.
- Keep the incision dry for 5 days. If you want to shower, make sure you cover the incision with plastic wrap.
- Do not use lotion, powder, or oil on the incision during the 4 weeks it takes for the incision to heal. You can use Vitamin E around the sides of the incision after 4 weeks as long as the incision stays dry.
- Do not scratch your incision area.

Q. How do I cope with my pain while at home?

- It is normal to have pain after surgery. You may feel different levels of pain especially as you begin to do more of your daily activities. Sometimes pain is better or worse a few days or a week after your surgery.
- To help control the pain:
- You will be given a limited prescription for pain medication. Get the prescription filled at a pharmacy on your way home.
- Follow the medication instructions.
- Take the medication before going for a walk or before the pain becomes very bad. The pain medication lets you exercise and do activities.

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- Pain medication can make you constipated. It is a common side effect – try to eat food high in bulk (for example bran and fruit) and drink lots of fluids.
- Take a stool softener everyday while you are taking narcotics. If you have not had a bowel movement after 1 or 2 days, take a laxative. You can get this from the pharmacy without a prescription.
- Please ask your family doctor for a refill of your pain medication if you need it. Your neurosurgeon will not prescribe a refill of your pain medication.
- You should not take any NSAIDs (Nonsteroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs) medication such as Ibuprofen, Celebrex and Naproxen unless your surgeon says it is safe to do so. Taking NSAIDs will slow down the healing process.

Q. How do I stop using the pain medication?

- You will feel less pain after a couple of weeks or so.
- Ask your family doctor to assess your pain medication as you feel less pain.
- Taking the pain medication less often and stopping slowly is often better than stopping all of a sudden. For example, if you are taking the pills every 4 hours, start taking them every 6 hours, then every 8 hours and then every 12 hours. After that, take the pills only as you need them.
- Try using other relaxing methods to help ease the pain, for example listening to music.
- If the pain gets a lot worse, tell your surgeon.

Q. Is it normal to feel tired after the surgery?

- Yes, feeling tired is a normal part of recovery. Try to focus on the future and take positive steps towards your recovery.

Booking Follow up Appointments

- Call your family doctor to make an appointment for a follow-up 1 week after your surgery.
- Call to make an appointment with your surgeon for 6 to 8 weeks after your surgery. (This is called your 'post op' visit).

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- **For Dr. Michael Fehlings' patients**, please book an appointment before going home:
 - Please go to the Spinal Cord Clinic on the 4th Floor West Wing
 - or
 - Call the Spinal Cord Clinic: (416) 603-5463

- **For Dr. Eric Massicotte's patients:**
 - Call the office to book an appointment: (416) 603-5675

You will need to have an X-ray done on the day of your appointment. Please go to the X-ray department 30-45 minutes before your appointment with your surgeon. For directions to the X-ray department, ask the Information Desk at the hospital.

What to bring to your appointment

- Please bring your blue hospital card and OHIP card with you to all your hospital visits.

Remember: You might need to wait for some time at your post op follow up visit because of an unexpected patient's situation.

We recommend that you keep your schedule free for the afternoon on the day of your appointment.

- If you change your family doctor, please tell the Spinal Cord Clinic Clerk so we can update your record.

Special Instructions For You:
