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Instructions for before and after Surgery **Anterior Cervical Fusion**

Before You Have Surgery

Do not eat or drink after midnight the night before your surgery. Please take all routine medications the day of surgery unless otherwise directed by Dr. Mathur, his nurse (Melissa), or Wake Med/Blue Ridge staff.

Medications to stop prior to surgery:

You may stay overnight in the hospital. Please bring your brace to the hospital the day of surgery. While you recover at home it is important you protect your cervical spine as it heals. This can best be achieved by following the below instructions and contacting your nurse with any questions or concerns.

When You Return Home

Your initial activity level will be influenced by the anesthetic agent you have received. It is not uncommon to feel drowsy or tired for a number of hours. Rest when you need it.

Throat/Voice Expectations:

- You may experience a sore throat and/or hoarseness for several weeks after surgery.
- Swelling in the throat can make swallowing uncomfortable.

Diet:

- Return to your normal diet slowly as tolerated.
- Start your diet with liquids. As your swallowing becomes better you may progress to soft foods and then to your normal diet.
- Sit up to eat all meals. Remove Brace to eat.
- Calories and protein are very important for the healing process. Restricting these are not recommended during this time.

Pain/Medications:

- **Pain is expected after surgery.**
- **You may have pain and muscle spasms in the neck/upper back/shoulder area.**
- Please take the prescribed medication that was provided for you after surgery as directed, as needed.
 - Pain Medication
 - Muscle Relaxant is for muscle spasms or muscle tightness you may experience.
- Pain medication can be constipating. Please try and prevent this with Colace (stool softener) or other over the counter stool softeners or laxatives that can be purchased at the pharmacy.
- If possible, after the first 2 weeks after surgery, efforts should be made to start decreasing pain medication intake.
- You may resume all other prior medications.
- Do NOT use any non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs) after surgery for a minimum of 4-6 months. These medications slow the fusion healing process.
 - Examples: Ibuprofen, Advil, Aleve, Celebrex, Vioxx, Naproxen
- Acetaminophen products may be used.
 - Examples: Tylenol, Excedrin

Neck Brace:

- Remove your brace to eat and shower.
- You must wear your brace when you are up walking around, while in the car and sleeping.
- You may take breaks from wearing your brace while you are sitting.
- You are to wear your neck brace until you come to your first post op visit. At this time we will discontinue your brace (approximately 10 days).
- The purpose of your brace is to stabilize your neck to allow for superior healing and to relax your neck muscles to prevent spasms.



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Incision Care/Shower:

- You will have a dry dressing (gauze & tape) over your incision when you leave the hospital.
- You may need to change your dressing once per day to keep it dry and clean- Gauze & Tape.
- Your incision will be closed with stitches that will dissolve by themselves, and surgical glue. The glue may start to flake off, this is normal. Please do not pull off the glue.
- Your incision may also be covered with steri-strips. These will fall off.
- **You may take a shower 3 days after surgery.** Allow soapy water to fall over incision. No scrubbing.
- If you have exterior stitches we will remove them at your first post op visit.
- With exterior stitches please keep incision covered for 5 days. You may shower 5 days after surgery.
- After your shower you do not have to keep your incision covered unless it is leaking/ has drainage.
- **DO NOT** use any creams, oils, lotions or medications on incision until approved by Dr. Mathur.

Sleeping:

- You must sleep in your brace. You may sleep on your back or your side. Place pillow between knees if you're on your side to sleep.
- To reduce swelling in your throat, do not lay flat.
- You may sleep in a recliner with your brace on if that is more comfortable.

Activity:

- **We encourage you to walk!** It will help the healing process by moving your blood in your body and will increase/maintain muscle strength. With this said, take it slow. Walk as tolerated.
- No dog walking until approved by Dr. Mathur or his clinical staff.
- No pools, bath tubs, Jacuzzis, Etc. until approved by Dr. Mathur or his clinical staff.
- **No driving until after first post op visit.**
- **No lifting more than 20 pounds and no lifting more than 10 pounds overhead.**
- Practice good posture when you walk and sit. This helps reduce stress on your neck.

Work:

- Most patients may return to work by their first post op appointment. This is dependent upon your job requirements. Please discuss this with Dr. Mathur or his nurse, Melissa.
- Work notes will be provided as needed. You may request a work note at your appointment or call the nurse as work allowances increase and notes may need to be adapted.

Follow-Up Appointments:

- Your first follow up appointment will be scheduled about 10 days after surgery. Healing is gradual and you will follow up over the next year.
- Physical Therapy will begin after your first post op appointment.

Call your nurse if you have any of the following:

1. Fever
2. Redness or discharge at incision (changing dressing more than once per day)
3. Difficulty swallowing
4. New neck or Arm pain/numbness
5. If you have difficulty breathing because of throat tightness

Call 911: If you are unable to swallow water or any thin liquid.

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