

Post Operative Instructions

1. Immediately after surgery, you will have an IV in your arm or hand. You may also have a catheter in your bladder and a drainage tube in your back.
2. After surgery, you may stand and walk to the bathroom with the nurse's assistance as tolerated.
3. Before surgery you will be given support hose to wear to help prevent blood clots. You need to wear these during the day until your first visit following surgery. You do not have to sleep in them.
4. If you had a fusion, your nurse will show you how to put on and take off your brace. Put on your brace when you get up in the morning and take it off to go to bed. You do not need to sleep in the brace. You need to wear this brace until Dr. Irby says you don't need to wear it anymore. Most of the time this is 3 months. You do not need to wear the brace to get up and go to the bathroom in the middle of the night.
5. You may resume your normal diet as tolerated when you return home
6. Walk! Walk! Walk! Walk! Your therapy is walking—as much as is comfortable, but shoot for 3-5 times per day. Sometimes your age and other joints will slow you down, but try to walk as much as you can. This will increase your endurance and overall strength. There is no specific distance you should start out walking, what's most important is that each time you walk, you try to walk a little farther. The easiest way to determine your distance is to actually measure it (laps around the dining room table, laps from one end of the house to the other, number of blocks walked outside, or distance on a treadmill). Use whatever you need to help you walk—a walker, cane (or canes), or your partner. If you feel you can walk independently, this is fine. You may sit/stand/walk as tolerated. As you improve, you will be able to do each of these for longer. You can go up and down stairs as needed. As the weeks go by, you will start to walk further and require less help. After several weeks, Dr. Irby will send you for physical therapy to help strengthen your back and improve spine mobility. Remember to wear your brace if you have had a fusion and/or fixation!
7. Some patients find that after surgery they have trouble moving their bowels. This may happen because of decreased activity, pain medication, and due to the effects of anesthesia. You can help prevent this by eating a lot of fresh fruits and vegetables, drinking plenty of water, and by walking. It is not uncommon after spine surgery to need a stool softener or laxative. It is very important that you do not become constipated and strain because this will cause increased pain at your surgery site. It can often take three to four days to have your first bowel movement. You can get a stool softener from the pharmacy, such as Dulcolax or Colace. Taking Metamucil on a daily basis may also help. If none of these are effective, you may require a suppository or enema.
8. There will be some pain around your incision for several weeks. Resting your back or taking prescribed medication can help with this. If you notice some increased back or leg pain while

walking, just stop and rest until this improves, then continue walking. It is not unusual to have some lingering numbness or intermittent pain in the lower extremities. If you had weakness in your legs before surgery, this can take several weeks to several months to recover.

9. Your wound is closed with stitches or staples. These will be removed at your first visit after surgery. Have someone change your bandage once a day to check the incision. Make sure there are no signs of infection, such as redness around the incision, swelling, or drainage. If any of these occur, you need to contact Dr. Irby's office immediately. Do not apply any ointment to the incision.

10. On the fifth day after surgery you may shower (not take a bath in a tub). You will need to buy a sticky bandage at the drugstore to seal off your wound. Let the water hit you in the front and not directly on the surgical site. Once you have completed your shower, remove your bandage and blot the wound dry.

11. At the time of your discharge you should have been given a follow-up appointment card to see Lindsey Carter, Dr. Irby's PA, about 10-14 days from your surgery. If you did not get one, call the office to make an appointment to see Lindsey.

12. You will also be given a prescription for pain medication when you leave the hospital. You should not need strong pain pills for very long following surgery. If you require a refill, please contact your pharmacy and have them fax a refill authorization request to us at (804) 288-4538.

13. You should not need anything other than your regular bed. It will be hard to get in and out of at first, but it is good exercise!

14. After surgery, you will need to wait 2 weeks to have sex with your partner. If you have had a fusion/fixation, you may need to wait a little longer. Ask for a booklet when you come into the office.

15. Wait until you have seen Dr. Irby before you begin driving.

16. Contact Dr. Irby's office if you develop

- Fever above 101 degrees for 24 hours
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Inability to urinate
- Changes in sensation in the extremities
- Pain not relieved by medication
- Redness and/or swelling
- Drainage from the incision