

## Discharge instructions: Neck surgery

### Cervical collar

- Cervical collars should be worn continuously.
  - This includes when sleeping and showering until you return for your initial post-operative appointment.
  - Replacement pads for the Aspen collar can be switched after showering to keep the collar clean. It's easiest to change the pads in front of a mirror. Shaving can be done at this time as well.
- Because the collar limits neck motion, you should not drive while you are in the collar and you should limit the amount of time traveling by car.

### Pain control

- Typically, we will prescribe a narcotic for the immediate post-operative period to control pain.
  - Usually 1-2 tablets taken every 4 hours is sufficient to provide relief.
  - Most patients need this only for the first 2 weeks following surgery.
  - You should reduce or discontinue medication as pain decreases.
- These medications contain a large dose of Tylenol. Therefore, you should not take additional Tylenol at the same time.
- Do not take non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, such as ibuprofen, naproxen or aspirin for three months following surgery as these medications may block proper bone healing.

### Constipation

- Pain medicines and anesthesia can be very constipating. If you experience constipation you can try any or all of the following:
  - Gentle physical activity.
  - Drinking plenty of fluids.
  - Taking over-the-counter stool softeners or laxatives, such as milk of magnesia or Dulcolax.

### Activity restrictions

- You should avoid working with your arms over your head or with your arms outstretched for prolonged periods as these activities put a lot of stress on the healing areas.
- Avoid driving while using an Aspen collar.
- No smoking.
- Avoid strenuous exercise.
- Avoid heavy lifting.
- No heavy housework for 1 month.
- Bed rest may **slow** your recovery.
  - Walking is the best exercise and daily walking is strongly encouraged.
    - Gradually increase the length and distance of your walks.
    - We suggest starting inside your home, then continuing out and around the yard as tolerated and progressing to short walks in your neighborhood or shopping mall.
  - Once you are able to walk without difficulty, you may drive.

### Incision care

- The outer dressings can be removed on the third day after your surgery, at which time your incision can be left uncovered.
- Do not apply lotions or cream to incisions.

- Steri-Strips will cover the incision(s) and will begin to fall off in approximately 7-10 days.
  - If they have not fallen off in 2 weeks, you may remove them.
- You may begin showering 3 days after surgery.
  - After showering pat area dry; **do not** rub the incision.
  - **If you had surgery on your head:**
    - Although you may shower, you will have staples in place. **Do not** get your head wet until the staples have been removed.
    - Wear a shower cap or take a bath during this time.
  - **If you had surgery on your back:**
    - Although you may shower, **do not** sit in a bath.

### **Warning signs**

**Please call your physician immediately at (804) 828-9165 if you experience the following:**

- Constant bleeding from the incision that will not stop after applying direct pressure for 10 minutes.
- If your incision develops redness or swelling, or a change in wound drainage, such as an increase in amount, a foul order or change in color.
- Change in mental status, such as unusual behavior, confusion and difficulty walking.
- A temperature of more than 101.5 degrees Fahrenheit.

### **Follow up**

- Please call the office your first week home to report your progress.
- If a post-operative appointment was not scheduled prior to your surgery, please call the office within 48 hours of being discharged to schedule your first post-operative visit.
- Your estimated return to work will be determined between you and your physician, but you should expect to be out of work for an average of 4-6 weeks or more.

**Please call us at (804) 828-9165 with any questions or concerns.**