

SPINE SURGERY

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Before Surgery

Will insurance pay for the surgery?

We send the information to our billing department and they work on obtaining the authorization for your surgery. If there are any issues we will let you know as soon as they tell us. Any deductibles and out of pocket expenses you will need to contact our patient billing services or your own insurance company to discuss.

Should I have “prehab” therapy prior to surgery?

By strengthening your body prior to surgery, you will be better prepared and may return to your prior level of function more quickly. If you feel like you would benefit from an exercise program please discuss more with your physician and possibly a physical therapist.

What is minimally invasive spine surgery?

Minimally invasive surgery refers to advanced surgical techniques that minimize tissue and muscle disruption. These techniques lead to a faster recovery, shorter hospital stays, lower complication rates, and faster return to work. While this approach is not appropriate for everyone, ask your physician for more details given your condition.

What time do I need to be here for day of surgery?

You will receive a call from the preop hospital nursing staff to let you know what time to arrive the business day before your surgery.

How long will I have to stay in the hospital?

Every surgery is different. Some can go home the same day of surgery and others will have to stay at least one night. Your physician and care team will let you know.

Why should I stop smoking?

Smoking, or any nicotine product, can slow down the healing process by restricting blood flow and nutrients to the surgical area. Most of our physicians (and insurance companies) require that you quit smoking 6 weeks prior to surgery until you are fully healed after surgery. If you need help quitting, please talk to your physician or contact quitnow@health.missouri.edu. Learn more at muhealth.org/our-stories/ellis-fischel-program-helps-smokers-kick-habit.

While in Hospital

When can I expect to be up moving after surgery?

Most generally our nursing and therapy team have you up to the chair or walking the evening after surgery.

Will I need a driver to take me home?

Yes. Due to being on pain medication and just having surgery you must have someone drive you home. Getting in and out of a mid-size vehicle is generally the easiest.

How much pain will I have after surgery?

Some pain is to be expected after surgery, but should improve a little each day. Your back may feel stiff and sore for a while and this is normal. The amount of pain and discomfort you experience can vary between each person. Your care team will work with you to find a medication that helps manage your pain. Your therapy team may also have suggestions on how to manage your pain.

Will I need someone to provide care to me after surgery?

It is recommended that you have someone stay with you for especially the first 24 hours, up to a week after surgery to help with daily activities until you feel up to it again. This need can vary for each individual. If more specialized care is needed, your case manager will work with you, your care team, and physician to determine what best fits your need.

Recovering at Home After Spine Surgery

When can I shower?

A sponge bath is ok up until 5 days after your surgery, making sure to keep your incision clean and dry. Avoid bathing or swimming until cleared by your physician. At 5 days after surgery, you may shower. Replace dressing with a dry dressing after your shower.

When do I take the dressing from the hospital off? 48 hours

How frequently should I do dressing changes? Daily

How long do I need to keep my incision covered? Until there is no drainage on dressing

What should my wound look like? Should there be drainage and redness?

Incisions should be closed with no openings through the suture line. Small amount of drainage can occur, but if your bandage is saturating completely and frequently we need to know about this. Redness is normal, but if it starts to streak outward, puff up more we need you to take your temperature and call your physician's office.

When can I drive?

Once off of narcotics and your physician says it is ok for you to do so. If in a cervical brace you are not allowed to drive until your physician clears you.

When will I be seen again after surgery?

You should have a follow up appointment to see your doctor in 2 weeks after surgery. In some cases, your doctor will want to see you sooner.

What are my limitations after surgery?

Avoid repetitive bending and twisting as well as pushing and pulling in the recovery period or until you've been cleared by your physician. You should also not lift any more than 10 pounds until cleared by your physician.

When should I stop my pain medicine?

Spine surgery can be painful, but understanding your pain and how to manage it is an important part of your recovery. Your care team will work with you to find the right balance to manage pain. While you might not be pain-free, you should still be able to resume your daily activities when you feel up to it. Take your medication when needed, but try to wean off when appropriate. Changing positions, icing, and walking can also help to decrease pain. If you are having trouble with pain or questions, reach out to your physician.

Will my throat be sore? How long?

It is normal to have some soreness and can vary on how long it lasts. If you've had an anterior (front of the neck) surgery and have soreness, it can be helpful to have a soft food diet and advance to your normal diet as you can tolerate. Other soreness can be related to being intubated during surgery. This can be relieved by using a lozenge or hard candy or drinking cold fluids. If this continues to be persistent and does not improve, or worsens, contact your physician.

When can I go back to work?

If your job doesn't require physical labor, you will probably be able to go back to work after 1 to 2 months. If your job involves light physical labor, it may take 3 to 6 months. If your job requires heavy labor, there is a chance you may not be able to return to those duties. This is something to discuss further with your doctor and care team.

How do I contact my doctor?

You should receive your doctor's contact information within your discharge summary. Please refer to muhealth.org/conditions-treatments/orthopaedics/spine-back-pain-treatment or call (573) 882-BACK.

Will I need physical therapy after?

This varies between each patient and should be discussed with your physician. Most of the time you will be referred to outpatient therapy around 6 weeks after surgery to make sure you are strong enough and can move in a safe manner as you return to your prior level of function.

Will I need a brace?

It may be possible to have a brace when you wake up from surgery. This depends on the surgery and the physician. If a brace is needed, the instructions and use will be individually discussed with you.