Lumbar Discectomy, Care after Surgery

A discectomy involves removal of *disc material* (the cartilage-like structures located between the bones of the back). It is done to relieve pressure on nerve roots. It can be used as a treatment for a back problem. The time in surgery depends on the findings in surgery and what is necessary to correct the problems.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Check the cut *(incision)* made by the surgeon twice a day for signs of infection. Some signs of infection may include:
  - A foul smelling, greenish or yellowish discharge from the wound.
  - Increased pain.
  - Increased redness over the incision *(operative*) site.
  - The skin edges may separate.
  - Flu-like *symptoms* (problems).
  - A temperature above 101.5° F (38.6° C).
- Change your bandages in about 24 to 36 hours following surgery or as directed.
- You may shower once the bandage is removed or as directed. Avoid bathtubs, swimming pools and hot tubs for three weeks or until your incision has healed completely. If you have stitches or staples, they may be removed 2 to 3 weeks after surgery, or as directed by your doctor. This may be done by your doctor or caregiver.
- Follow your doctor's instructions as to safe activities, exercises, and physical therapy.
- Weight reduction may be beneficial if you are overweight.
- Daily exercise is helpful to prevent the return of problems. Walking is permitted. You may use a treadmill without an incline. Cut down on activities and exercise if you have discomfort. You may also go up and down stairs as much as you can tolerate.
- DO NOT lift anything heavier than 10 to 15 lbs. Avoid bending or twisting at the waist. **Always** bend your knees when lifting.
- Maintain strength and range of motion as instructed.
- Do not drive for 2 to 3 weeks, or as directed by your doctors. You may be a passenger for 20 to 30 minute trips. Lying back in the passenger seat may be more comfortable for you. Always wear a seatbelt.
- Limit your sitting in a regular chair to 20 to 30 minutes at a time. There are no limitations for sitting in a recliner. You should lie down or walk in between sitting periods.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- There is increased bleeding (more than a small spot) from the wound.
- You notice redness, swelling, or increasing pain in the wound.
- Pus is coming from wound.
- You develop an unexplained oral temperature above 102° F (38.9° C) develops.
- You notice a foul smell coming from the wound or dressing.
- You have increasing pain in your wound.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop a rash.
- You have difficulty breathing.
- You develop any allergic problems to medicines given.

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