

Activities of Daily Living After Spinal Injury or Surgery

This handout gives guidelines to follow after spinal injury or surgery. Following these guidelines will protect your spine and help you recover.

General Tips

- Use the guidelines in this handout to do your regular daily activities.
- At first, you may need lots of rest breaks. Plan your days to include times to rest.

Also, be sure to:

- Prioritize sleep. Aim to get good quality sleep every night.
- Get dressed every day.
- Eat healthy meals.
- Slowly resume the hobbies or social activities you enjoy.

Protect Your Spine

For the first 4 to 12 weeks after your surgery, or until your healthcare team tells you otherwise, remember to follow the **BLTs**:

- **Bending:** Do **not** bend your spine.
- **Lifting:** Do **not** lift more than 5 **or** 10 pounds. Your doctor will tell you how much you can lift. (A gallon of milk weighs 9 pounds.)
- **Twisting:** Do **not** twist your back or neck.

Your provider will tell you if you need to wear a back brace and when to wear it. Your occupational therapist (OT) can show you how to use it.

Getting Out of Bed

Use the 3-step “logroll” method to get out of bed:



Getting into Bed

1. Sit far back from the edge of the bed, near the top $\frac{1}{3}$ of the bed.
2. Lie on your side by lowering onto your elbow, then onto your shoulder.
3. Lift your legs onto the bed with your knees bent.
4. Roll onto your back. Keep your hips and knees together as you do this, like a log.

Standing Up from a Bed, Chair, and Toilet

- **Use elevation** for sitting, if needed. You may want to put a pillow or foam cushion on your chair.
- Do not sit on low, deep, or soft chairs and couches that could be difficult to stand up from.
- Your occupational therapist may recommend using a bedside commode, raised toilet seat, or grab bars at home if your toilet is too low.

Getting Dressed

- Wear loose-fitting tops so that you do not twist your upper body when getting dressed and undressed.
- When putting on pants, socks, and shoes:
 - Sit down and bring your foot up to the level of your opposite knee, instead of bending down to reach your foot.
 - If it is hard for you to reach your feet, you can use a sock aid, long-handled reacher, or a long-handled shoehorn to put on and take off your socks, shoes, and pants. Your OT can show you how to use these tools.

Showers

- Do not soak in a bathtub or hot tub, swim, or use a sauna. You can shower when your doctor tells you it is OK to do so.
- Have someone help you the first few times you shower, until you feel sure about your safety.
- To avoid slipping, wear sandals, shoes, or socks with non-slip tread when you shower.
- Your occupational therapist may also recommend a shower chair or tub-transfer bench to sit on in the shower. This will make you safer and help you save your energy.

Specific Activities

For **6 to 12 weeks after surgery**, or until your healthcare team tells you otherwise:

- **Have someone else do chores** such as vacuuming, sweeping, mopping, raking, digging, mowing the lawn, or other “heavy” activities.
- **Avoid lifting.** Ask someone else to lift anything that weighs more than your doctor said you are allowed to lift. This includes groceries, laundry, children, pets, or other items.
- **Do not open** tight jar lids, stuck windows, or heavy doors. Ask someone for help.
- **Do not bowl, ski, run, ride a horse**, or do anything else that causes you to bend or twist your upper body or bounce a lot.
- **Do not drive** until you are no longer taking prescription pain medicine. These drugs slow your reaction time and make driving unsafe.

Sexual Activity

When you can resume sexual activity depends on your rate of recovery after surgery. Use your best judgment and follow your precautions. If you have any questions, ask your doctor or OT.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Your provider's name and phone number:

Be Patient with Yourself

It is normal to feel frustrated, stressed, tired, or depressed after a major injury or surgery. Some people feel they are not as sharp mentally. Do not make yourself do mentally challenging tasks. Talk with your healthcare provider if you have these feelings and feel overwhelmed by them.