

# Rehabilitation and Recovery Program After Cervical Spine Procedures

## Precautions

- Do not lift more than 10 pounds until you are cleared by your doctor to do so.
- Limit sitting to no more than 30 minutes to prevent compression of the discs in your neck.
- Avoid pulling with both arms at the same time.
- Do not begin neck *range of motion* (ROM) or cervical isometric exercises until cleared by your doctor.

## Therapy Goals

1. To become as independent as possible with your mobility and exercises.
2. To demonstrate proper body mechanics for mobility and activities of daily living.
3. To understand the reasons for the precautions and activity guidelines.
  - a. Reduce post-surgical pain
  - b. Protect post-surgical incision
  - c. Promote healing of surgical site

## Body Mechanics

- It is important to use proper body mechanics to protect your spine by keeping it aligned.
- When getting in and out of bed, log-roll to your side and sit up at edge of bed without twisting.
- This reduces strain on your spine and maintains good alignment.



## Sitting Posture

- Avoid soft chairs. Choose chairs that support good posture – a lumbar roll may help.
- “Activate” your abdominal muscles and “grow tall.” Maintain this good upright posture to strengthen the muscles that support your back.
- Use pillows under your forearms to keep strain off neck when sitting in chair or bed.



## Standing Posture

- Keep your head lined up directly over your shoulders, hips, and ankles.



## Sleeping Posture

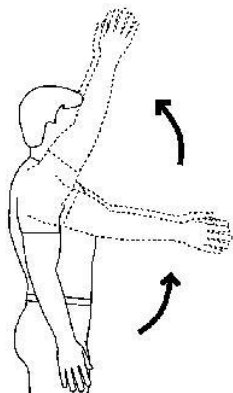


- Sleep with your neck in a neutral position with one small pillow.
- You may use a small rolled towel at base of pillow for further neck support if needed.

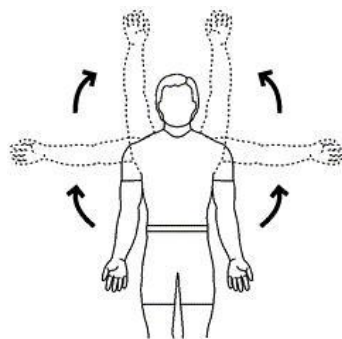


- When lying on your side put a pillow between your legs to minimize twisting. A pillow in front of you will keep upper body from twisting. Keep your head in a neutral position with a pillow.

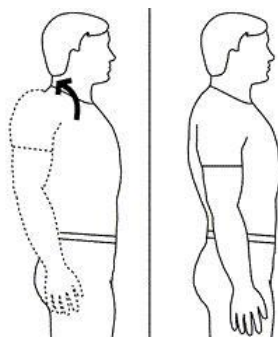
## Shoulder Range of Motion



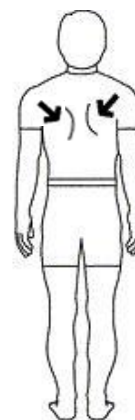
Front arm raises



Side arm raises



Shoulder circles



Scapular squeezes

## Post-Operative Walking Program

- **It is important for you to walk every day.** This activity helps your heart, lungs, and spine get stronger.
- Walk at a comfortable pace and **stand up straight** with whatever device you use.
- Walk on level ground (a smooth surface if possible) for the first several weeks.
- When you first get home you may only be able to take short walks. Be sure to take a few walks each day. Start by walking in your home and gradually increase time and distance each day.
- **2 to 3 week goal:** 30 minutes, 7 times a week.
- **3 to 6 week goal:** 30 to 60 minutes, 5 to 7 times a week.
- If there are some days that you cannot take a long walk, take several short walks at home or at work to keep moving.
- **Stairs:** There is no reason to avoid stairs if you can use them safely. Stairs will help to increase your strength. Follow your physical therapist's instructions for stair safety.

## Helpful Hints

- Plan and prioritize your day to spread your tasks throughout the day to avoid overdoing it. Plan to incorporate your exercises into your plan twice a day.
- Rearrange your household items so that the most commonly used things are kept between waist and shoulder height. Work at counters that are a height that allows you to keep good posture.
- Sit in a supportive chair to put on pants, socks, and shoes. To keep a straight back while doing these tasks, cross your ankle over your opposite knee and bend from your hips. If needed, an *occupational therapist* (OT) may train you to use adaptive devices.
- Do not drive until your physician says it is okay to do so. You may need to take breaks on your ride home, to be sure that you do not sit for too long (do not sit still for more than 30 minutes).
- When picking items up from the ground, maintain a neutral spine. Activate your abdominal muscles while you bend your knees. Use adaptive equipment such as a reacher as instructed by your OT.
- Change positions carefully, as dizziness and fatigue are common after surgery.

**Questions?** Your questions are important. Please call 206.520.5000 if you have questions or concerns.