

Thoracolumbar spine home care: important things to know when caring for your child

What can be done for pain?

Your child will have some pain and soreness after surgery. It may be caused by the incision or the way your child was positioned during surgery. The soreness will go away slowly over several weeks or months.

During this time, your child may need pain medicine.

- You may get information about medicines to help with your child's pain, and who to call. If you need a refill please call the team who is caring for your child's pain. Plan ahead; do not wait until you are out of pain medicine to call.
- There are ways to help with pain besides medicine. Help your child relax by taking deep breaths or listening to soothing music. Read a book or watch movies to distract them from the pain.
- Ibuprofen is ok for up to 2 weeks after discharge. Use as needed, if prescribed. After the 2 weeks, do not give your child anti-inflammatory medicines for 1 year after surgery. They could prevent the bone from healing. These medicines include, but are not limited to: Aspirin, Ibuprofen, Motrin, Advil, Aleve, Nuprin, and Naprosyn. Please check with your child's health care provider if your child is on any other medicine.

Diet

- Your child can eat their normal diet. It is important for your child to drink a lot of water. They should also eat a lot of fruits and vegetables. This reduces the risk of constipation. If your child is g-tube fed, resume home feeding schedule as tolerated.
- Until your child is done taking pain medicine they should take a stool softener or laxative to prevent constipation.
- If your child is not getting enough fluids, they may get dizzy. To prevent this, have your child drink lots of fluids.
- Once your child stops taking pain medicine and is no longer constipated, they can take a multi-vitamin with iron. This helps with healing.



Bathing and scar care

- Take only a sponge bath until your provider says it is ok to take showers. Most often, this is after the first follow-up appointment and the wound is healed.
- Keep clothing over the incision for one year after surgery. This is needed to avoid all exposure to the sun. After one year, use a sunscreen with SPF30 or higher.
- Your child's scar will change color many times as it heals. The way a scar looks depends on your child's skin type. Some skin types heal with a thicker scar than others. Most often, a scar will slowly get smaller with time.

School

- While at home, as your child is able, they should spend time doing school work. This will help keep your child from falling behind.

- Every child is different and should return to school at their own pace. Most children go back to school between 2 to 6 weeks after surgery. It may be better to return to school slowly. Your child can go half days at first. Increase the time slowly until they are going the full day.
- Heavy lifting should not be done. If your child's book bag is too heavy, they should ask a friend to carry it. Your child's doctor can write a prescription for two sets of books. One can be kept at home and one at school. This keeps your child from having to carry books to and from school.
- Your child cannot go to gym class or school sports after surgery until the surgeon says it is ok.

Dental Precautions

- Tell your child's dentist or orthodontist (oral surgeon) about the spinal surgery. It is important that they know about any hardware that was put in your child's spine.
- For 3 years after surgery, your child will need to take an antibiotic before a dentist or orthodontist visit. This includes a visit for teeth cleaning or any dental procedures. The antibiotic needs to be taken one hour before the visit. Talk to your child's health care provider if your child must go to the dentist and an antibiotic is needed.
- One year after surgery, talk with your child's surgeon to decide if antibiotics still need to be used for dentist or orthodontist visits.

Tattoos or body piercings

Your child should not get a tattoo or body piercing for at least one year. There is a higher chance of infection due to the implants.

Smoking

Smoking is never recommended. Being around smoke can delay wound healing after surgery. It may increase the risk of the spine not healing. This can increase the chance of the rods breaking. It can also lead to lung infections.

Activity Guidelines

These activities and times are guidelines only. They will vary for each child. Please **talk with the health care team before starting an activity**. Your child should not do anything that will cause more than just a little pain.

If your child was in physical therapy before surgery, they can start again after the wound is healed and it is comfortable for them.

Bending

Motions that make your child twist, bend at the waist or are jarring may hurt at first. To avoid bending at the waist, your child should use their knees to stoop. This way, the leg muscles are used and not the back muscles.

Once home from the hospital these things are fine

- Use stairs.
- Ride in a car or school bus.
- Sit in a reclining chair.
- Visit with friends.
- Walk.

6 to 8 weeks after surgery

- May lift up to 10 pounds.
- Gently ride a bike. Do not do tricks on the bike.
- Play a lightweight musical instrument.
- Do light household chores.
- Drive.
- Gently swim. Do not jump or dive. No competitive swimming.

3 to 4 months after surgery

- Throw a ball.
- Shoot baskets.
- Dance.
- Vacuum.
- Mow lawn.
- Jog.

6 months after surgery

- Play tennis.
- Play soccer.
- Play golf.
- Roller blade.
- March on the drill team.
- Return to cheerleading (no pyramids).
- Go on some limited amusement rides.

1 year after surgery

Almost all activities can be re-started. Check with the doctor for specific activities.

Other

Trampolines should never be used.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.