

*Wichita Mountain*  
*Neurosurgery*  
*& Spine*

by David M. Pagnanelli, M.D.

**Going Home after Cervical Spine Surgery**  
A Brief Guide to Aid in Your Recovery

You need time to heal after surgery. It can take 4 to 6 weeks for the swelling to go down around your muscles, tendons and other soft tissues. It's natural to feel tightness or pain around your incision. It is not uncommon to occasionally feel pain similar to the pain you had before surgery. Also don't be alarmed if you have some numbness in your arm or fingers. This too is common and can last for several weeks. If you become tired or have neck pain, get in bed and rest. This need not be cause for worry.

It is, however, very important to take care of yourself during your recovery period. There are certain things you should and should not do in the time before your first visit back to our office.

**Below is a list of guidelines for you to follow until your doctor tells you otherwise:**

1. Avoid lifting or carrying objects over 10 pounds. Do not pull or try to move heavy objects.
2. Avoid neck positions that require you to tilt your head for an extended period of time. For example, don't look up at the ceiling or down at the floor for more than a few minutes at a time. Step up on a stool instead to see something at eye level. Bend your knees and tilt forward from the waist to wash your face or brush your teeth.
3. You can shower after discharge. Dry the operative site well afterwards.
4. When you wash your hair, face away from the shower to help keep your neck dry. Also tilt your entire upper body back instead of tilting your neck forward or backward.
5. Do not drive the car for three weeks after your discharge from the hospital. You may be a passenger.
6. If you were given a collar, wear the collar when you ride in the car as a passenger for the first 3 weeks after your discharge from the hospital. **Only wear your collar when you are up walking around.** You DO NOT need to wear the collar when you are sitting or lying down.
7. Since neck stiffness is common for several weeks, you can use a heating pad or ice to help relieve this. Use ice for the first three weeks. If you have been given a circulating ice water pad, use it for about 20 minutes each hour.
8. Remember your muscles can take several weeks to heal naturally. Do not do any exercises until you've discussed it with your doctor. Exercises will not speed healing.
9. Try not to move suddenly and twist your neck.
10. Get your prescriptions filled upon discharge, but take the pain medicine only when needed. Try nonprescription medicine and ice before turning to the prescription medication.
11. Do not wear anything heavy around your neck that puts additional pressure on it.

**Additional Instructions on next page....**

## **Here are some additional instructions for you to follow:**

### **When Sleeping:**

Try to get 10 hours of rest at night for the first three weeks after your discharge from the hospital. Even if you can't sleep, lie down and rest. If you are uncomfortable in bed, the following may be helpful:

Sleep on your back or side and support your back and neck with five pillows. Position the pillows so that they create a reclining or semi-sitting position for your entire upper body. Remember it is important to keep your neck and spine in a straight line. If this doesn't help, wear a neck collar at night. (We can prescribe a collar if you don't already have one.)

### **When Sitting**

Try to sit with your neck and back in a straight line with your shoulders flexed back and your chin tucked in. (Think of how the posture you would expect from a child when you tell him/her to "sit up straight").

### **When Driving:**

Avoid thrusting your chin over the top of the steering wheel. If necessary, sit on a firm cushion to help you see out the front window instead.

### **When You Feel Tense:**

When people feel tense, they often unconsciously thrust their chin forward. Make a deliberate effort to relax your muscles. When you feel tense, make sure to keep your chin tucked in and your neck and spine in a straight position.

### **Office Hours**

Our office hours are **Monday through Friday from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM**. We ask that you call between these hours with your questions, concerns, prescription refill requests, etc. As a surgeon, I am frequently in the operating room and therefore unable to be available during all office hours.

### **Prescriptions**

All prescription refills and changes must be requested during office hours. We advise patients to monitor their need for refills so that refill requests can be made during your office visit.

### **Emergencies**

We understand that emergencies arise. If you feel that it is absolutely necessary to speak with your doctor during non-office hours, our answering service is available, by simply dialing our office telephone number listed below. **We ask that this service be reserved only for emergencies.**

**5604 SW Lee Blvd  
Suite 357  
Lawton, Oklahoma 73527  
580-531-4600**