

Patient information factsheet

Spinal enhanced recovery programme

We have given you this factsheet because you are due to have spinal surgery. It explains what our spinal enhanced recovery programme is and what to expect in the days before and after your spinal surgery.

This factsheet is designed to help increase your understanding of the programme, and to enable you and your family to take an active part in your recovery.

Please read this factsheet thoroughly. If you have any questions or concerns, please make a note of these and bring them along to your pre-operative appointment.

What is the spinal enhanced recovery programme?

The spinal enhanced recovery programme is a pathway of care that is designed to enable you to be well enough to go home one to two days after your spinal surgery.

Preparing for surgery

It is important to plan for when you return home after your surgery. Being as organised as possible now can help to prevent any delays to you going home.

Things to consider

- Ask someone to come and stay with you if you think you may need help once you are home.
- Ask friends or family for help with shopping, cleaning or looking after pets if you think you may find this difficult.
- Think about personal hygiene as you may find it difficult to have a bath or shower.
- If going up and down stairs is difficult for you, consider making space for a bed downstairs (if possible) and arrange to have it brought down before you come into hospital.
- You may need a commode if your bathroom is upstairs (your local Red Cross can supply one for you).
- Have a phone by your bed or carry a cordless phone in your pocket if you live alone.
- Remove or move loose rugs, trailing electrical flexes and make sure the lighting is good to reduce the risk of you tripping or falling.
- Stock up the freezer with precooked food or microwave meals.
- Keep everyday kitchen items in easy reach.
- If you have space, have a table and high chair to eat at or a high chair by a work surface so you don't have to carry your meals from room to room.
- An apron with a large pocket is useful for carrying small items.
- Do not undertake any major decorating before your admission that leaves your house unsafe.

If you feel you are likely to have difficulty with any of the above, please discuss this with your general practitioner (GP).

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You may also be able to access additional support and/or equipment from local community services, such as:

- a social worker
- a local community rehabilitation team
- an occupational therapist

If you are not already known to these teams, speak to your GP who will be able to make any necessary referrals for you.

Medications

Please bring all your usual medications **in their original containers** into hospital with you. It is very important that your medications are in their original containers, as we cannot use them if they have been transferred into another pot or container.

Make sure you have plenty of your usual medications at home before you come into hospital.

Do not stop taking any of your usual medications unless we have advised you to do so at your pre-operative appointment. If you do have to stop any medication, we will give you written information at your pre-operative appointment to remind you which to stop and when.

Some herbal and homeopathic remedies have some side effects, and some can increase your risk of bleeding, which could delay your surgery. We cannot always tell which ones do this, so please stop taking any herbal or homeopathic remedies **at least one week** before your surgery.

This is especially important for the following remedies:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| • echinacea | • ginkgo biloba |
| • turmeric (safe in cooking) | • ginseng |
| • ephedra | • valerian |
| • kava | • garlic (safe in cooking) |
| • St John's wort | |

Health advice

You need to be as healthy as possible for major surgery to aid a quick recovery. Taking some simple steps in the weeks leading up to your surgery can help you recover more quickly.

- Try to give up smoking or at least cut down. For support with stopping smoking, visit: www.uhs.nhs.uk/for-patients/your-stay-in-hospital/stopping-smoking
- Reduce your alcohol intake.
- Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet. This will improve your skin condition and help with wound healing. It will also help to prevent constipation. For more information about this, visit: www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide
- Maintain the correct weight for your height. For more information about this, visit: www.nhs.uk/health-assessment-tools/calculate-your-body-mass-index
- Make sure your skin is unbroken and free from sores or open areas. This will reduce the risk of infection. An infection could stop you going to surgery.
- Make sure your teeth and gums are free from infection.
- Walk and exercise within the limits of your pain. You will find the rehabilitation process easier if you have a good level of fitness before your surgery.

Eating and drinking

We will provide you with more information about what you can eat and drink before your surgery at your pre-operative appointment. If you are unsure about anything, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

Pre-operative appointment

Before your spinal surgery, you will attend a pre-operative assessment appointment.

At this appointment, you will meet with various members of our multidisciplinary team (MDT). MDT refers to a group of healthcare professionals from different specialties who work together to coordinate and provide care for individuals. We will ask you questions about yourself, your social situation and how you are currently managing with your condition.

We will also:

- perform a physical examination
- request any necessary tests (for example, x-rays or blood tests)

This appointment is a good opportunity for you to highlight any concerns you may have about your hospital stay or your recovery. We have also included a list of helpful online resources available to you in the 'Useful links' section on page 7 should you need to confirm any details about your upcoming surgery and hospital stay.

During this appointment, we may give you carbohydrate drinks to take home with you (unless you have diabetes). You will need to drink these at 6.30am on the morning of your surgery before you come into hospital. We will explain this to you in more detail at your pre-operative appointment.

Before your pre-operative appointment

If you have a preference as to the gender of the person assessing you at your pre-operative appointment, contact us before your appointment to request this. Please note that we cannot accommodate requests for a different member of staff on the day.

Please wear appropriate clothes for the physical examination (for example, a t-shirt or shirt with trousers, shorts or a skirt). **Do not** wear clothing such as a full-length dress which will mean you have to fully undress.

Hospital admission

The day of surgery

If we have provided you with two carbohydrate drinks, please drink these at **6.30am on the morning of your surgery**.

We will ask you to come in early on the day of your surgery to our admissions ward (please see your appointment letter for more details). If your surgery is in the afternoon, you can sip 170ml of plain water per hour up until you go into theatre.

The anaesthetist and surgeon who will perform your surgery will visit you before you go into theatre to ensure you are still well enough for surgery. This is a good opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have. From there, you will go to theatre for your surgery.

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Depending on what type of spinal surgery you are having, the length of your surgery will vary. Your surgeon will have discussed how long your surgery is likely to take with you.

After your surgery, we will move you to a recovery area. We may ask you to start doing some deep breathing exercises and gentle movement to encourage circulation while you are here. We may also give you something to eat and drink.

A short while later, we will move you to a ward, where we will make sure you are comfortable. Depending on the length of your procedure and time spent in the recovery area, it's possible that it will be later in the evening by the time you are settled onto the ward.

While you recover on the ward, we will:

- closely monitor you and take regular observations (for example, your blood pressure, heart rate and oxygen levels)
- give you pain relief medication in tablet or liquid form
- give you some oxygen through tubes in your nose or a mask
- place pneumatic pumps around your calves (this is to promote good circulation until you can walk)
- give you anti-embolic stockings to wear (this is to prevent blood clots)
- check the drain coming from your wound (if applicable)

We may also:

- give you some intravenous fluids (fluids given directly into the bloodstream) via a drip
- insert a urinary catheter (a flexible tube used to empty the bladder and collect urine in a drainage bag) if you are finding it difficult to pass urine

The day after surgery

Most people will be able to go home the day after their surgery, but occasionally some people may need to stay in hospital for longer. How long you will need to stay in hospital will depend on your level of fitness before surgery and whether there were any complications during your surgery.

While you recover on the ward, we will:

- give you a dose of blood-thinning medication and pain relief medication as needed
- arrange for you to have a post-operative x-ray (if necessary) which a senior doctor will then review
- come and get you out of bed and encourage you to try to walk (you may need a walking aid if you were using one before)
- remove any drips and drains
- monitor your observations
- check your wound and dressings (we will change your dressings if needed)

Once you are able to get out of bed and move around the ward more comfortably, we will encourage you to:

- use the bathroom
- wash and dress independently (if able to)
- sit out in a chair for all your meals

Equipment assessment

A member of our ward team will come to see you and talk through what you will need to be able to do at home. We will offer advice and support as needed. We will also establish whether you need any further equipment to be able to recover safely at home by looking at activities such as you getting on and off the bed, chair and toilet. If you have stairs at home, we will also complete a stairs assessment with you.

We will now have a good idea of your abilities and will be able to confirm your discharge (going home) plans with you.

Going home

When you are well enough to go home, we will let you know so that you can arrange to be collected. **You won't be able to drive yourself home after surgery, so please arrange for someone to collect you and take you home.**

We will aim to discharge you around midday, but please be aware that this is not always possible. We may ask you to wait in the discharge lounge until your family member, friend or your arranged transport arrives to collect you.

Before you leave hospital, we will:

- advise you on pain control and how to care for your wound
- give you a separate post-operative advice sheet containing important aftercare information and contact details

Our pharmacy team will also supply you with any medications we have prescribed you.

Follow-up care

You will receive a follow-up appointment by letter. This appointment will be with a specialist spinal physiotherapist approximately six to eight weeks after your surgery.

Aftercare advice

Wound

Your wound will be at the site of your surgery (this may be on your back or front depending on the type of surgery you had). It will be covered with a surgical dressing. To minimise your risk of infection, you should only change the dressing if it becomes wet or unstuck. We will provide you with spare dressings and instructions on how to care for your wound before you go home.

Your wound will be closed with surgical stitches (either absorbable or silk) or clips. We will provide you with instructions for the removal of the stitches or clips before you go home. If you need to have the stitches or clips removed, this will usually be done by your practice nurse at your registered GP practice.

It is normal for your wound to feel tender and sore for a few days. You may also find it uncomfortable to sit, move or eat and drink initially. This will usually get easier within a few weeks. Gentle moving around can help your wound to heal faster.

Your wound may also ooze a little or have some redness or swelling - this is normal. The nursing team will monitor this while you are in hospital.

If you have any concerns about your wound **in the two weeks after your procedure**, contact us for advice using the details included in the post-operative advice sheet we have given you.

If you have any concerns about your wound **after two weeks**, contact your GP for advice.

Some people may need a review with their practice or district nurse once they are home. We will discuss this with you before you leave hospital and make any necessary referrals.

Scar

You will be left with a scar at the wound site. Once your wound has healed, you should gently massage the scar using a simple moisturising cream (such as E45) every day to prevent any thickening and adhesions (bands of scar tissue).

Pain and stiffness

While your muscles are healing, it is perfectly normal to have some discomfort. This may be due to muscle spasm or the trauma of the surgery. While you are in hospital, we will prescribe you pain relief medication. It is important to take this medication as suffering from pain can slow down your recovery.

It is also important that you try and move as normally as possible. The therapy team will advise you how to do this if you are having difficulty.

Walking can help to improve your walking pattern and stamina. We may offer you a walking aid to improve your mobility, increase your confidence and help with balance, if needed.

You should also rest for periods during the day to allow your muscles and ligaments time to rest and recover, ready for the next activity.

If your pain levels concern you once you are home, contact your GP to discuss this.

Exercise

We recommend that you move regularly throughout the day and avoid long periods of sitting if you have had lumbar (lower back) surgery. A nurse or a member of the therapy team will advise you on the level of exercise that is appropriate for you. They may also provide you with some specific exercises to complete. If you wish to rest for longer than 15 to 30 minutes, you should lie down instead. If you can walk, this is the best form of exercise initially. We will give you further advice on exercising at your follow-up appointment.

Daily activities

We encourage you to continue with your daily activities as independently as you can after your surgery. This includes:

- washing and dressing
- meal preparation
- other daily tasks that you could do before surgery

You may initially have some difficulties due to wound pain and stiffness, but this should ease with time.

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Driving

Do not drive until you are able to safely:

- complete an emergency stop
- operate the pedals
- turn your head to see in your blind spots

If you experience any new altered sensations or weakness in your limbs, you should not drive. Please check with your insurance company that you are covered to drive after your surgery.

Work

You will need a period off work following your surgery. How long this will be may vary depending on the job that you do. Your surgeon will advise you how long you are likely to need off work. If you need a 'fit' note, please ask a member of your medical team for this before you leave hospital. If you are self-employed, you should plan, where possible, for cover to allow you time to heal and recover.

Bladder and bowel function

If you have trouble going to the toilet (bladder and/or bowel function issues) at any point before or after your surgery, contact us for advice using the details below.

Sexual activity

You can resume sexual activity as soon as you feel ready to after your surgery. You may have to trial different positions to avoid over-stretching or straining your back.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us.

Wessex spinal unit

Telephone: **023 8120 6508** (24-hour line)

The therapy team and advanced clinical practitioner can also be contacted via the number above.

Useful links

For more information about our spinal enhanced recovery programme, scan the QR code below or visit: www.uhs.nhs.uk/departments/brain-spine-and-nerves/spinal-service/spinal-enhanced-recovery-programme



www.uhs.nhs.uk/for-visitors/southampton-general-hospital/getting-here

www.uhs.nhs.uk/for-patients/patient-information-leaflets

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

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