

Cervical Spine Surgery

Your Day Surgery and Recovery at Home

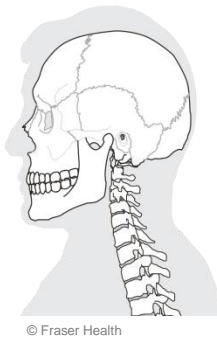
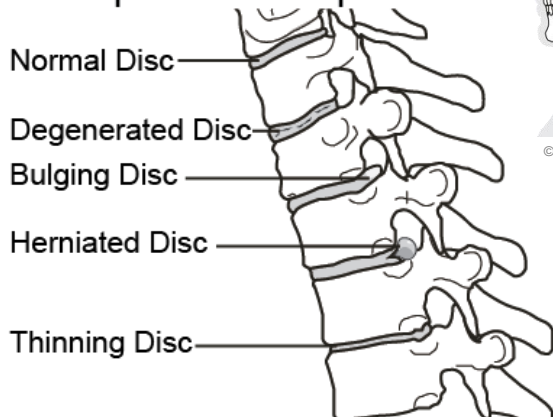
Eagle Ridge Hospital • Royal Columbian Hospital

I am having:

- A disc removed (discectomy)
- A disc replacement (disc arthroplasty)

You are having surgery on the neck or cervical part of your spine. This surgery is usually done to relieve pain, numbness, and/or tingling in the neck, shoulder, or arm from pressure on a spinal nerve or the spinal cord. This could be caused by a bulging disc, a degenerating disc, a herniated disc, or a thinning disc.

Examples of disc problems



Appointments after surgery

See your family practitioner.

My appointment is on: _____

See your surgeon.

My appointment is on: _____

Going home checklist

- You have a ride home and someone to stay with you for 24 hours or longer, if needed.
- You know what medicine(s) to take, as well as when and how to take them.
- You know what you cannot do for 24 hours (because of anesthetic) including:
 - ✗ not driving or operating hazardous machinery
 - ✗ not drinking alcohol or using any substance or street drug
 - ✗ not making important decisions or signing legal documents

The surgeon makes a small cut (incision) through the front of your neck (sometimes the back of the neck). All or part of the disc is removed. The disc might be replaced with a man-made one.

You usually go home the same day or 1 day after the surgery. This will depend on your recovery and your health before the surgery.

Family Practitioner: Refers to family doctor or nurse practitioner

www.fraserhealth.ca

This information does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.

Caring for Yourself at Home

Drinking and Eating

For the first 24 hours, you might only be able to drink liquids (your throat will be sore or swollen). Once swallowing is easier, you can return to your normal diet.

You might feel sick to your stomach (nausea) or throw up (vomit). This should not last long. It is important to stay hydrated.

If you feel sick or throw up:

- Drink 'flat' ginger ale, clear soups, and clear fluids, and eat mild foods until you feel better. Other good choices include dry toast, crackers, popsicles, and gelatin dessert (such as Jell-O). Stay away from caffeine, carbonated soft drinks, and acidic fruit juices while feeling sick.
- Drink and eat small amounts often.
- Rest in bed until you feel better. Place a cool, damp cloth on your face and neck.
- Try not to smoke or be around smoking. Smoke can make your nausea worse.

You might get constipated because you are less active or eating less fibre. To prevent constipation:

- Drink plenty of liquids each day (unless you have been told differently).
- Eat high fibre foods such as bran, prunes, whole grains, vegetables, and fruit.
- Walk and move around as much as you can.

If you continue to be constipated, talk with a pharmacist or family practitioner.

Activity and Rest

If you go home the same day as your surgery, rest for the remainder of the day. Anytime you lie down in the first 24 hours, rest your head on 2 or more pillows. After the first 24 hours, balance your activity and rest. Try to get 8 hours of sleep each day.

For the first few days, your neck muscles will probably be stiff and sore. Try to keep your head and neck in a neutral position. Try not to twist or turn your head.

For 2 to 3 weeks after the surgery, or until you see your surgeon:

- * **Do not** lift, push, or pull anything over 5 kilograms (10 pounds), including carrying children and groceries.
- * **Do not** vacuum, rake leaves, or do any other reaching activity.
- * **Do not** play any sports.

You cannot drive or return to work until approved by your surgeon or family practitioner.

Do not drive or drink alcohol if you are taking an opioid medication or a muscle relaxant.

Your incision

Always wash your hands before and after touching around your incision.

You can shower 24 hours after the surgery. Try not to let the shower spray directly on your incision. Gently pat the area dry.

Until the incision is healed: No soaking in a bath tub or hot tub, no swimming, and no creams, lotions, or ointments on the incision (unless directed by your surgeon).

Managing pain

If you had numbness and/or tingling in your arms or hands before surgery, it could still be there after. It can take a few weeks for this to go away.

You might also have muscle spasms for a couple of days. Your surgeon lets you know what medication to take to ease the spasms.

Your pain should be at a comfortable level that allows you to move, deep breathe, cough, and to do every day activities.

Your surgeon gives you instructions to take pain medicine. This could be for non-prescription (over the counter) pain medication such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs★ (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) or naproxen (Naprosyn, Aleve®).

★ **NSAIDs are not for everyone after surgery.** If you have (or have had) health problems such as stomach ulcers, kidney disease, or a heart condition, speak with your surgeon or family practitioner before using NSAIDs.

Depending on the type of surgery, you might also get a prescription for a pain medication that contains an opioid (narcotic). Examples:

- Tramacet® (tramadol and acetaminophen)
- Tylenol #3® (codeine and acetaminophen)
- Oxycocet® / Percocet® (oxycodone and acetaminophen)

Note: These medications also have 300 to 325mg acetaminophen in each tablet. It is important to know because you should not take more than 4000mg of acetaminophen in a day from all sources (too much can harm your liver).

If your pain is at an uncomfortable level, take your pain medicine as directed. As your pain improves, take your pain medicine less often and/or a smaller amount until you have little or no pain, then stop.

At first, you might have to take a prescription medication. After a short time and as your pain improves, a non-prescription pain medicine should be enough to manage your pain.

Always read the label and/or information about how to safely take medication from the pharmacist.

Questions about medications? Speak to your local pharmacist. After-hours, call 8-1-1 and ask to speak to a pharmacist.

When to get help

Go to the nearest Emergency or Call 9-1-1

if you have any of the following:

- severe problems swallowing
- very hoarse voice
- trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- extreme drooling
- face drooping
- any sudden severe pain
- chest pain

Call your surgeon or family practitioner

if you have any of the following:

- pain that does not ease with pain medicine
- a fever over 38°C (101°F)
- warm, red, swollen incision, or blood or pus (yellow/green fluid) draining from the area
- a new numbness, tingling, or weakness in your arms or legs

Can't contact your surgeon or family practitioner?

Have any questions about your recovery?

Call 8-1-1 (HealthLinkBC) to speak to a registered nurse any time - day or night.