

Physiotherapy following your spinal surgery

This leaflet gives you advice about recovering from your thoraco-lumbar spinal surgery. It explains the exercises you should do each day, things to look out for and some general advice about activities, such as driving and returning to sport.

If you have any further questions, please speak to your doctor or the physiotherapist caring for you.

Your surgery

The types of spinal surgery performed at Guy's and St Thomas' include:

- **Discectomy**
This is when part of the disc which is pressing on and irritating the nerve is removed.
- **Laminectomy**
This is when the bony arches at the back of spine are removed, which allows more room for the spinal nerves.
- **Fusion**
This is when two spinal bones are joined permanently using screws, rods, plates or cages.

What can you expect from your physiotherapist?

Your physiotherapist will assess you after your surgery, show you how to start moving and help guide you through your physical recovery whilst in hospital.

We will:

- teach you how to get in and out of bed
- teach you exercises which help you gently activate and strengthen your core muscles as well as prevent you from becoming stiff after surgery
- help you practise your walking with or without a walking aid
- teach you how to climb stairs if required.

Your physiotherapist will come and see you on the ward after your surgery, either the same day as your surgery or the day after.

How do I get in and out of bed after spinal surgery?

Your physiotherapist will teach you how to get out of bed correctly following your spinal surgery. To avoid twisting and flexing your spine, we recommend that you roll onto your side, and then sit on the edge of the bed, then stand up from the bed.

The pictures below show you how to get in and out of bed.



Roll onto your side and bend your knees



Lower your legs from the side of the bed and use your arms to push yourself up into sitting

Your back should stay straight throughout the action

To get back into bed, first sit on the edge of the bed, then lower yourself onto your side and bring your legs up onto the bed in a bent position, you can then turn onto your back

Why do I need to exercise after my spinal surgery?

It is important that you follow the exercise programme, because it will:

- help to restore normal movement
- activate and strengthen your back and core muscles
- reduce post operative stiffness.

The following exercises can be started the first day after your surgery. Your physiotherapist will teach you how to do these. The exercises should be carried out three or four times a day.

Your exercise programme:

1)



Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet in line with your hips.

Relax your stomach. Breathe in gently and on breathing out, slowly draw your tummy button up and in. You should feel a gentle tightening in your stomach.

Do not allow your back or pelvis to move.

Hold for 5 seconds.

Repeat 10 times.

2)



Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet in line with your hips.

Tilt your pelvis backwards by bracing your tummy muscles.

Hold for 5 seconds.

Repeat 10 times.

3)



Lying on your back with knees bent and arms by your side.

Tilt your pelvis forwards and back by gently lowering your back into the bed and then raising it away from the bed.

Hold for 5 seconds

Repeat 10 times

4)



Lying on your back with knees bent and feet on the floor.

Lift your pelvis and lower back gradually off the floor. Hold the position. Lower down slowly returning to starting position.

Hold for 5 seconds

Repeat 10 times

5)



Lie on one side with your hips and knees bent and your back in neutral position.

Leaving your heels together, slowly lift the top knee by turning your hip out without letting your back or pelvis twist.

Hold for 5 seconds

Repeat 10 times

Will I be in pain?

You should expect a moderate amount of pain following your operation. You will be prescribed painkillers and it is important that you take these regularly, as prescribed by the doctor looking after you so that you can complete your exercises.

What will I need to avoid after spinal surgery?

- Avoid excessive bending for six weeks, you may begin light bending at two weeks.
- Avoid heavy lifting for six weeks, you may begin light lifting at two weeks.
- Avoid prolonged or strenuous activity for six weeks.
- Avoid heavy physical activity for six weeks.

When can I return to normal activities?

Daily activities

You can sit in a firm armchair as long as you feel comfortable.

You can sit on a normal toilet seat

You may walk around as comfortable

You may use a shower to wash as long as your wound is covered with a waterproof dressing

When dressing, we advise you to bring your heel to your other knee to put on your socks and shoes, rather than leaning down to your feet.

Work

You will need to take time off work after your spinal surgery. The time frame varies and depends on the type of surgery you have had and the nature of your job. Your surgeon can advise you on when you are allowed to return to work.

As a guide, if you have a desk based job you should arrange at least two weeks off work. The first two weeks after surgery should be dedicated to your recovery so you should not work at all during this time. If you have a heavy manual job it may take up to 3 months before you can return.

Driving

Ask your surgeon while you are in hospital or at your follow up appointment six weeks after surgery when you can return to driving. You can usually start driving between two and six weeks after your operation, but this is dependent on your recovery. You must be able to carry out an emergency stop safely and confidently. Always check with your insurance company before driving after your surgery as they may refuse to meet a claim if they feel you have driven too soon.

Sport

You must avoid all contact sports until you have discussed this with your surgeon when you return to your follow-up appointment in the clinic. Ask for guidance about returning to specific sports from your surgeon or physiotherapist.

Will I have physiotherapy after I leave hospital?

When you leave hospital you may be referred for outpatient physiotherapy either at Guy's and St. Thomas's or at your local hospital. Your physiotherapist will discuss this with you. If you have been referred to physiotherapy, you should expect to have an appointment four to six weeks after your surgery date. If you are due to be attending physiotherapy at your local hospital and have not heard from them by this time about your appointment please contact your GP.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns regarding physiotherapy, please contact the orthopaedic physiotherapy team on 020 7188 5432 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 6.30pm)

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) e: complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 e: languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

t: 0800 731 0319 e: members@gstt.nhs.uk w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership