Postoperative Recovery Guide
Minimally invasive decompression

STAND TALL

STAND TALL

Photo of an elderly man standing outdoors, looking into the distance.

Laser Spine Institute®
What can I expect from Laser Spine Institute after surgery?

The road to recovery — it's a journey Laser Spine Institute is committed to sharing with you. Over the following 12 weeks, we invite you on the next part of the ride. And to make sure you stay on course, we've included a step-by-step instructional guide. In it, you'll find information on the crossroads you need to stop at, the ones you need to yield at and the activities you can go full speed ahead with and enjoy.

A nurse will assist you with any medical questions or concerns you might have. We will follow up with you at two weeks, six weeks and 12 weeks after your surgery. If you have questions or concerns related to your surgery, please feel free to call the SPINE LINE for recovery assistance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medication</th>
<th>Resume # of days after surgery</th>
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For medical questions about your recovery, contact your SPINE LINE 24 hours/day | 7 days/week:

- **Tampa** – 1-877-712-6573
- **Scottsdale** – 1-888-712-6543
- **Philadelphia** – 1-877-712-6558
- **Oklahoma City** – 1-888-712-6563
- **Cleveland** – 1-877-712-6572
- **St. Louis** – 1-877-712-6571
- **Cincinnati** – 1-888-712-6564

**Billing questions:** 1-866-362-7574, ext. 8956  
**Medical records:** 1-866-362-7574, ext. 140

Please note that medical records for your procedure will be available three weeks after your surgery.
Highlights of your 12-week recovery

We've provided these general guidelines to assist in your recovery from minimally invasive spine surgery.

Lifting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Up to 10-15 lbs. as tolerated</td>
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<td>Weeks 1-2</td>
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<td>Weeks 4-12</td>
<td>Up to 25 lbs. as tolerated</td>
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**DO NOT DRIVE** for the first 24 to 48 hours or while taking pain medications or muscle relaxers.

Return to work*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Light office</th>
<th>Physical labor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cervical</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>3-12 weeks depending on lifting requirements. If lifting more than 25 lbs., return-to-work instructions may be extended to 12 weeks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thoracic</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lumbar disc decompression</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
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*Please contact the SPINE LINE to discuss your specific job duties. Our nurses can provide specific instructions as they relate to lifting requirements at your job.
Medications

- Take your pain medication and muscle relaxer as directed. Take pain medication and muscle relaxers two hours apart.
  - Use an over-the-counter laxative such as Dulcolax tablets or citrate of magnesia along with a stool softener such as Colace.
  - Drink plenty of water. Prune juice may also be helpful.
- If prescribed, remember to take your antibiotics.

- **DO NOT** drive while taking pain medications or muscle relaxers.
- **DO NOT** consume alcohol while taking pain medication.
- **DO NOT** combine or take more medication than prescribed.
- **DO NOT** go more than 48 hours without a bowel movement. Pain medications often cause constipation. Seek medical attention if this condition persists.

Body mechanics

- Plan your moves.
- Lie on your side while sleeping.
- Take care when getting in and out of your vehicle. Try not to bend from your spine; instead, bend from your hips and slowly sit down onto the car seat. Then gently slide your feet into the car. Have your Care Partner help you so that you can close the door.
- Attempt to take two to three walks for five to 10 minutes each while wearing your support for the first three days following surgery, **as tolerated**.
- Limit any activity that applies added weight to the spine, e.g., lifting, bending, carrying and twisting.
- Avoid staying in one position for long periods of time. Change positions frequently, except for when sleeping.

- **DO NOT** bend from your spine. Bend from your hips and knees only.
- **DO NOT** lift more than 15 pounds. Lift only **as tolerated**.
- **DO NOT** push or pull beyond the advised weight limits.
- **DO NOT** participate in sustained or repetitive reaching, bending or twisting, for up to six weeks after surgery. Cervical surgery patients should also avoid overhead movement.

Brace use

- If you have had a discectomy or disc decompression, wear your back brace for four to six weeks after your surgery. Otherwise, a soft brace is recommended for comfort.
- If the brace causes any discomfort while sleeping or when worn for long periods of time, please remove it.

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For medical questions about your recovery, contact the SPINE LINE | 24 hours/day | 7 days/week
Surgical dressing

- Your incision will be closed by one of the following: external Steri-Strips with internal dissolvable stitches, external stitches with internal dissolvable stitches or surgical glue with internal dissolvable stitches.
- Your incision site must be kept dry and clean for the first two weeks after surgery.
- If your dressing becomes wet, reinforce the bandage every four days using the extra gauze that was provided in our clinic. Place white tape over the gauze using firm pressure as you apply.
- If there is any redness, warmth or excessive drainage that saturates the dressing, please call the SPINE LINE immediately.
- Ensure clean bedding and clothing are used after surgery.

- **DO NOT** allow your dressing to get wet. You may shower with caution following the postoperative appointment.
- **DO NOT** soak or swim for the first two weeks or until your incision is completely healed.
- **DO NOT** pull on the suture material if it is sticking out of your incision. In some individuals the body reacts to the suture and tries to rid itself of it.
- **DO NOT** remove surgical dressing. It will be removed in the clinic.
- **DO NOT** remove your Steri-Strips, allow them to fall off on their own.
- **DO NOT** rub, scratch or pick at the skin adhesive on your incision.
- **DO NOT** apply barrier creams, petroleum jelly or mineral oil to the incision at any time until your incision is completely healed.

Ice

- **Lumbar/thoracic:** Lie on your back with pillows under your knees, and place ice on the covered incision site. Keep the ice on for 20 minutes and off for two hours, repeating three to four times daily while awake. If you are unable to lie on your back, lie on your side with a pillow between your knees. If you are issued an IceMan® cold therapy unit, you may use it continually. Place a towel or cloth between your skin and the IceMan® to prevent cold injury.
- **Cervical:** While sitting, place the ice on the incision site. Keep the ice on for 20 minutes and off for two hours, repeating three to four times daily, while awake. If you are issued an IceMan® cold therapy unit, you may use it continually. Place a towel or cloth between your skin and the IceMan® to prevent cold injury.
- After day four, the immediate postoperative period, please use ice as necessary for comfort and after increased activity.

Travel

- If you were provided compression stockings, please wear them while traveling.
- If flying, avoid sitting for prolonged periods of time. Stand up or walk one to two times per hour if possible.
- If traveling by car, stop one to two times per hour to take short walks.

- **DO NOT** carry or pull your luggage. Allow your Care Partner to help you.
How should I be feeling?

At this stage of your recovery, you might still feel some pain related to the incision site and some lingering nerve pain and tingling. This is normal and the pain will dissipate over time. It may take up to six months for your body to be completely healed.
DO’s

Schedule an appointment with your local Laser Spine Institute clinic or your primary care provider to have your incision site checked two weeks from your surgery date.

The first three days after surgery, attempt to take two to three walks between five and 10 minutes each, wearing your support. For days four to 14, attempt three to four walks daily between 10 to 20 minutes each, as tolerated.

Watch the Daily Activities videos on Spine-Exercises.com.

Listen to your body. If an activity or exercise hurts, stop performing it or avoid it totally.

You may be sexually active as a passive partner.

You may use ice as necessary for comfort and after increased activity.

DON’Ts

DO NOT allow your dressing to get wet. You may shower cautiously following the postoperative appointment.

DO NOT soak in a tub or swim for the first two weeks or until your incision is completely healed.

DO NOT lift more than 10 to 15 pounds. Use proper body mechanics, and only lift as tolerated.

Notes

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How should I be feeling?

During these weeks, you might still be sore. Some tenderness and pain are expected at this stage of your recovery. Your pain might be less than before you had surgery, so it is important to remember to take it slow and not tax your body.
DO’s

Your incision site should be checked by your local Laser Spine Institute clinic or primary care provider 12 to 14 days after surgery. Once the incision site is completely healed, you may bathe or swim.

Begin the post-surgical exercises from videos on Spine-Exercises.com.

You make take short walks, up to 15 minutes, every one to two hours as tolerated.

Limit any activity that applies added weight to the spine, e.g., lifting, carrying, bending and twisting.

You may return to work with the necessary restrictions depending on your surgeon’s recommendation, type of surgery performed, specific job description and prior fitness level. A return-to-work form may be obtained through the Patient Services Department by calling the SPINE LINE.

You may use ice as necessary for comfort and after increased activity.

You may drive with caution as long as you have stopped your narcotics and/or muscle relaxers.

DON’Ts

DO NOT lift more than 10 to 15 pounds the first four weeks following your surgery.

DO NOT start a job that requires repetitive bending and twisting.

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How should I be feeling?

You may still feel some soreness with certain tasks. Although you are starting to feel better, it is important to make sure that you are not pushing your body too hard.
DO's

You may start **limited** bending and twisting using proper body mechanics at four weeks after surgery, e.g., to pick up clothes. At six weeks you can increase your activity, but avoid repetitive bending and twisting. After eight weeks, if you are symptom-free, you may resume normal bending and twisting with proper body mechanics, as tolerated.

You may drive with caution as long as you have stopped your narcotics and/or muscle relaxers.

Continue with your exercises:

- Generally speaking, you should strive for cross-training. This simply means to vary the parts of your body you exercise. Avoid always performing the same aerobic exercise or strengthening exercises; remember to alternate between exercises such as walking, biking, elliptical training, back/abdomen strengthening and aquatic exercise. Avoid activities that put you at risk of falling.
- High-repetition exercise with light weights can be started after six to eight weeks, as long as these exercises are pain-free. Avoid heavy pushing, pulling or lifting with weights during these exercises.

You may return to playing sports between six and 12 weeks after your surgery. Individual recommendations will vary based on symptoms and surgery performed. Please call the SPINE LINE for further guidance.

You may request a prescription for physical therapy after six weeks, if necessary.

DON’Ts

**DO NOT** participate in excessive activities such as heavy lifting. Up to week eight after surgery, only lift up to 25 pounds as tolerated. Bend at the knees when picking up anything heavier than 10 to 15 pounds.

We strongly recommend that you do not participate in extreme sports or activities including, but not limited to, boating, skiing or horseback riding for six to eight weeks following your surgery.

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FMLA and disability certification

Laser Spine Institute will gladly complete medical leave certification for FMLA and/or short-term disability. If you need medical documentation from us, please observe the following guidelines:

• Please provide us with the specific forms to complete from your employer, as well as the name, phone number and fax number of the HR/disability representative to whom we should send the completed forms. Complete any employee/patient sections but do not write in the provider sections. You must sign an authorization form to disclose/release medical information. This form will be included in your FMLA/Disability Claim Packet.

• FMLA and short-term disability forms will be completed approximately three to five business days after your surgery. If you are scheduled for more than one procedure, the forms will be completed following the postoperative appointment for your final procedure.

• Once the forms are completed, we can fax or mail them only to you, your employer or insurance provider.

• Your Patient Services Representative handles requests for Return to Work (RTW) Order/Certification when you are approaching readiness to return to work. Patients will need to request an RTW Order/Certification, as the forms are not automatically sent. These forms will be completed within three business days of receiving a request.

• If you need a work leave note for your employer, please request it from the clinic during your postoperative visit.

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