

THE PROCEDURE

Your surgical procedure is Posterior Lumbar Intervertebral Fusion (PLIF). Please keep this information for reference when calling our office. On-call physicians will need to know exactly the type of surgery you have had, and the date.

We discussed the risks and benefits of your surgery in the office. I have included these in your instructions, since it can be difficult to remember everything we discussed. Should you have any further questions regarding this information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Benefits: Your surgery is being done to relieve pain that has not been relieved with conservative measures. Weakness and numbness can take weeks to months to resolve. In fact, you may experience more numbness or tingling initially after the surgery.

Risks of your surgery: These include, but are not limited to, infection, bleeding, nerve damage, weakness and/or pain (worse than you have now), spinal fluid leak (requiring bed rest and possibly more surgery), failure of surgery to relieve your pain, and the possibility that you could require more surgery including additional fusion operations.

As you recover from your surgery, you should experience progressive improvement in your preoperative pain. It is not unusual to feel some pain, numbness, tightness, burning or other "funny" feelings for a while following your operation. Usually these sensations will lessen and mostly go away with time. Numbness can last for weeks to months.

At the time of discharge, the hospital nurse should give you prescriptions and a follow-up appointment. You should be given an order for X-rays of your lumbar spine. These will need to be performed the week of your follow-up visit. Be certain that you have the actual x-rays when you return to my office. If you were not given a return appointment, please call our office upon arriving home to schedule this visit.

Please call between 9:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Wound Care: If you have staples or sutures in your incision, you will be given an appointment for removal one week following your operation. Most patients will have no sutures or staples that require removal. If your wound has been closed with Derma-bond, please follow the care instructions from the Derma-bond handout. Do not scratch the Derma-bond. It will begin to slough off 7-10 days after your surgery. At this time you may use a warm wet washcloth to rub the rest of it off. If your wound has been closed with steri-strips (butterfly-like skin closures over your incision), you should remove them 7-10 days after your operation, if they have not fallen off on their own.

If your wound has been closed with Dermabond, you may get your incision wet in the shower, as soon as you wish, since this closure is waterproof. If your wound has been closed with staples, sutures or steri-strips, you may remove your dressing two days after the surgery and, at that time, you may get your incision wet in the shower. New bandages or dressings are not necessary. Use only soap and water to gently clean the area around your wound. Do not soak your incision for four weeks following the operation. During this time, bathtubs, hot tubs, swimming pools, whirlpools, and the like, are not allowed. Do not let the shower water "beat" on your incision.

You should not put any salve, lotion, ointment or Vitamin E on your incision during the first month after surgery. If you notice any problems with your incision, such as redness, drainages, swelling, etc., please call the office as soon as possible for instructions. It is not uncommon to have mild redness with staples.

Activities & Driving: You are not permitted to drive a motor vehicle for one month following the surgery. It is unlikely that you will feel comfortable enough in the first 30 days to drive. You cannot drive while taking pain medication. You should not do any lifting, bending, straining, stooping, or twisting. You should not lift anything heavier than ten pounds. You should minimize sitting in the postoperative course. You may recline in a recliner, lie on the sofa, or be upright. Sitting increases the pressure on the surgery site and may increase low back discomfort and spasms. The only exercise permitted, and in fact encouraged, is walking. After you have been up and around for



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several days, begin a walking program, gradually progressing to one mile, two to three times a day. When you return for your first postoperative visit (1 month), I will give you more exercises to do.

Prescription Refills: You have been given several medications. One is a pain medication, which you may take regularly for the first few days following the surgery, and then as needed. You have been given a muscle relaxant, which helps relieve muscle spasms. You should take this as prescribed for the first three days following the surgery and then as needed. You have been given a 30-day supply of these medications from the time of surgery and you should not require any more. If you require medication refills, please call the office between 9AM and 4PM, Monday through Friday. We will try to expedite your request, however please allow 24 hours for your prescription to be processed. Call your pharmacy 24 hours after your request to check on your prescription before calling our office back. **Please Note: *The on-call physician will not refill prescriptions at night or on weekends.***

You may NOT take anti-inflammatory medications (Ibuprofen, Advil, Motrin, Aleve, Celebrex, Nuprin or Vioxx) **for the 3 months following surgery.** These medications will interfere with the fusion process and can limit your progress. Tylenol or Acetaminophen is okay to take and will not affect your fusion process. You should NOT smoke or use any **tobacco** during the first 6 months following your surgery. The nicotine in tobacco severely blocks the fusion process. Your fusion takes approximately 6-12 months to take place. If your fusion does not heal, you could require more surgery.

Sexual Activities: You may resume your sexual activities once your post-operative pain subsides. For females, take necessary precautions to avoid pregnancy until your fusion is solid and you have discussed pregnancy with me.

Out of Work: You can expect to be out of work for a minimum of three to six weeks following your operation, depending on your healing progress and type of work you do.

We want your surgical experience to go smoothly. If you have any questions or problems, please do not hesitate to call the office at 508.771.0006.

You may find the following websites to be helpful regarding your surgery: www.allaboutneckpain.com, www.spineuniverse.com, www.neurosurgery.org, www.spinehealth.com, www.allaboutbackpain.com.

Thank you for letting me participate in your care,

Paul J Houle, MD
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Patrick Murray, MD
G. Kenji Nakata, MD