



Advice for before and after surgery

Mr. Alan Gardener FRCS has kindly allowed us to recreate his advice sheet, with some additional information from SAUK. The sheet will give general guidance for preparation and recovery from scoliosis surgery. When preparing for surgery you may want to get someone to help you with assessing your current situation in order to equip you to deal with any difficulties you may encounter after your operation. You may want the help of an occupational therapist, or you and a friend or parent could work together. You may want to:

- Look at your current level of function, observe and note down your personal activities of daily living and domestic activities of daily living and what they involve.
- Think about your current level of mobility and how this will differ after your operation.
- Find suitable accommodation for after your operation, or prepare your home, such as making arrangements for sleeping downstairs if the stairs are too difficult, and make sure you have a support network for after the operation.
- Talk through any worries you may be having with a friend, or if you are especially worried, speak to a professional to help you mentally prepare for surgery.

Before your operation

- On admission to hospital the nurses will explain the general situation. You will have some routine tests if they have not been done beforehand and you will be shown around the High Dependency Unit, where you will stay for 36-48 hours after surgery, after which you will return to your hospital room.
- The physiotherapist will teach you breathing exercises, and foot, and toe exercises (to prevent blood clots forming in the leg) and turning (log rolling).

After your operation

- You will have physiotherapy (described above). You will be log rolled in bed for the first 48-72 hours or so until you can turn over by yourself.
- About 48-72 hours after the operation the drips may be removed.
- On the fifth postoperative day you will be transferred from your ward bed onto a special electric bed, which will help you to stand up over the next 2-3 days.
- On the seventh or eighth postoperative day you may be fitted with a lightweight fibreglass jacket, which you will wear continually for 2-3 months (your consultant will give you specific instructions).
- Patients are usually able to go home 6-9 days after surgery. You will have been able to manage stairs before going home.

At home

- Go home by car with the seat reclined at 45° and stay at home. A follow-up appointment will be arranged about 8 weeks after the operation.
- Most of the time, lie down or recline no higher than an angle of 45° from the horizontal either in bed, on a settee or on garden ratchet chair. Your back must be comfortable; if it is not then you will need to change your position.
- You will need a firm and comfortable bed, chair or settee.
- You should walk around 4 or 5 times a day for 5 to 10 minutes only, as comfortable, including visits to the toilet etc.
- People vary in their ability to sit. Your back will tell you whether sitting is good or bad. Most people find that sitting for 5 or 10 minutes for meals etc is tolerable, but if it is uncomfortable then you should recline at 45° for your meals.

- You may use the stairs as necessary, but preferably twice a day only. However, if you need to use them more for essential purposes then try and go very slowly and use a hand rail.
- You may sleep in any position that is comfortable and does not stress your back.
- You may continue with gentle back exercises, which you will have been taught in hospital. Straight leg exercises may also be advised. Try to regularly change your posture and position (every 30 minutes)
- No baths, and showers only with a non-slip mat. You will need someone to help you for the first few days, especially if you do not have a walk-in shower arrangement.
- Do not lift anything heavier than a kettle of water. You will need someone to help you with preparing meals etc for possibly 3 to 4 weeks.
- Get up late, early to bed, try to relax and avoid stressing your back during the first 8 weeks.
- A long shoe horn and pick-up sticks are helpful. Boots and Wilkinson, and similar shops sell these items.
- Always wear warm light clothing to keep warm, especially on your back. Make sure you get dressed everyday instead of staying in your sleep wear.
- Remember to take things easy and try not to use too much energy. The body is repairing itself so it is important to eat low calorie high protein food – try to avoid putting on too much weight.
- No prolonged standing for ironing, cooking, washing etc for 6 to 8 weeks.
- The above advice relates mainly to the first 2 to 3 months after your operation. After that you can gradually increase your activities as your back allows, so that when you are seen at your first follow-up appointment you are ready to start an exercise programme. You can expect to return to work or relatively normal activities 14-16 weeks after surgery, although this of course varies a great deal from person to person, and some patients with particular problems may take longer.
- No driving for a minimum of 8 weeks and it is advised that you do not travel as a passenger for 5 to 6 weeks unless the journey is essential.

General principles

The advice given above will apply to most patients, but we are not all motor cars with the same handbook! The one simple rule is that your back will tell you what you can and cannot do. If in doubt, do not hesitate to ask by telephoning the scoliosis nurse specialist or ward sister. We all share your wish to obtain the best possible result from your surgery. After your follow-up visit you will usually be advised to start an exercise programme to get you fit again, with walking, exercise bike (if it does not hurt), and swimming etc. Physiotherapy may also be advised. Other activities are suitable if they do not affect your back. Sports that jar your back, such as horseriding, squash, and contact sports are generally inadvisable during the recovery period, but in the long term lighter sports such as tennis, badminton, sailing, golf etc are usually achievable. In general, you can do light sports such as table tennis and swimming at 4 months, and other sporting activities 6 months after surgery.

For other advice on coping with daily activities, have a look at the posture, positioning and independence with daily activities help sheet. You can also call the SAUK Helpline on: 020 8964 1166, for further information.