

Advice for before and after surgery

When getting ready for surgery you may want to get someone to help you think about your current situation and prepare for difficulties you might have after your operation. You may consider the help of an occupational therapist, or you and a friend or parent could work together. You may want to:

- Make a note of the activities that you do each day and what they involve, such as; walking, dressing, bathing, cooking, childcare, and jobs around the house. You will need to think about how you will manage these tasks as you recover. Are there people that can help?
- Make sure you have a suitable place to stay after your operation or prepare your home.
- If you can, try to make sure that you have a support network for after the operation. Don't be afraid to let people know that you will need their help.
- Talk through any worries you may be having with a friend or parents. If you are feeling very worried or anxious you can speak to your doctor. Your doctor can help you find extra support such as counselling to help you mentally prepare for surgery.

Before your operation

- Most units run a pre-admission clinic at which information and skin scrubs are given. The scrub is to clean your skin before you go to hospital. This stops bacteria from growing on your skin. It is important to

follow the instructions to prevent infections.

- When you arrive at the hospital the nurses will explain what will happen. You might stay the night before or arrive on the morning of your surgery. When you arrive nurses will carry out some tests such as taking your blood pressure and temperature.
- At most hospitals you will attend pre-admission a few weeks ahead of the operation. During pre-admission you will usually meet the surgeon and the anaesthetist (specialist doctor who makes sure you are asleep during operation). They will talk you through what is going to happen. There will be documents to sign to make sure you understand what is being said.
- After your surgery you will be brought to a recovery room and woken up, you will be monitored and given pain medication.
- As soon as you are ready you will be brought to your hospital room or ward. The nurses will check on you regularly to make sure you are as comfortable as possible. They will take your blood pressure and temperature. You will be given medication to help with pain.

Continued overleaf

After your operation

- The physiotherapist will teach you breathing exercises and foot and toe exercises (to keep the blood going through your body and stop blood clots forming in the legs). You will also be shown how to turn in a special way called log rolling.
- You will have physiotherapy. You will be log rolled in bed for the first 2 to 3 days or so, until you can turn over by yourself.
- About 2 to 3 days after the operation the drips may be removed.
- The physiotherapist will help you to gradually start to stand up and walk.
- You may need to wear a brace to protect your spine for 3 to 6 months after the operation.
- Patients are usually able to go home 6 to 9 days after surgery. Staff will make sure that you can manage stairs before going home.

At home

- It is best to travel home by car with the seat reclined. It is a good idea to have a pillow to help cushion your back when you go over bumps. Ask the driver to go slowly and carefully. A follow-up appointment will be arranged for about 8 weeks after the operation.
- You should try to be as mobile as possible but it is important to follow your specialist's recommendations.

- When lying down or reclining either in bed or on a settee your back should be comfortable. If it is not then change your position. You will need a firm and comfortable bed, chair, or sofa.
- Some people find sitting easier than others do. Your back will tell you whether sitting is good or bad. Most people find that sitting for 5 or 10 minutes for meals or other activities is okay. If it is uncomfortable then you should recline slightly to eat your meals.
- You can sleep in any position that is comfortable.
- You can continue with gentle back exercises. You will have been taught to do these in hospital. You might also have been taught straight-leg exercises. Try to regularly change your posture and position every 30 minutes.
- Don't try to take a bath, and shower only if you have a non-slip mat. You will need someone to help you for the first few days.
- Do not lift anything heavier than a kettle of water. You will need someone to help you with preparing meals and other jobs for about 3 to 4 weeks.
- Get up late and go to bed early. Try to relax, and avoid putting your back under strain during the first 8 weeks.
- Always wear warm light clothing to keep your back warm and try to get dressed every day.

Continued overleaf

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Please get in touch for our feedback questionnaire, available online or in paper form.



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- Try to avoid standing for long periods of time doing ironing, cooking, washing, or other activities for 6 to 8 weeks.
- No driving for a minimum of 8 weeks. It is advisable that you do not travel as a passenger for 5 to 6 weeks, unless the journey is essential.

The above advice is for the first 2 to 3 months after your operation. After that you can gradually increase your activities as your back allows. Often when you are seen at your first follow-up appointment you will be given an exercise programme to help you get fit and active. You will usually be told to avoid sports that jar your back for a year or more after the operation; such as horse riding, squash, and contact sports. In general, you can do regular sports 3 to 6 months after surgery. Again it is important to follow your specialist's recommendations.

Depending on your age you might be ready to return to work or school around 4 to 6 weeks after surgery. This timescale is different for each person. Many patients will be back to normal activity levels around 3 to 6 months after surgery. Again, this will not be the same for everyone. Some patients will take longer to return to normal activity.

For other advice on coping with daily activities, take a look at the posture and positioning, and Managing daily activities help sheets.

Your recovery

This advice should be helpful as a guideline, but everyone is different. 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 phoning the scoliosis nurse specialist or ward sister.

Try not to compare yourself to others and don't be hard on yourself if it is taking longer than you hoped to recover. There will almost certainly be times when you will feel angry and upset that you aren't able to do what you could before. You will get there in the end! In the meantime go at your own pace.

When things are tough remember what you have been through. Spinal surgery is a big deal! Your body is amazing and you have been really brave. It's not unusual to find things hard but you aren't alone. You can talk to the SAUK team or we can put you in touch with others who have been through an operation. It can really help to talk to people who understand what you're going through.

Remember to be kind to yourself, celebrate each small milestone and be proud of your achievements.

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