FOR PATIENTS & FAMILIES · SPINE SURGERY

KG

Before spine surgery, *a checklist.*

What to ask the surgeon's office, what to set up at home, a walking log, and the signs that need action.

ASK BEFORE SURGERY

- ☐ Which operation: a discectomy, a decompression or a fusion? At how many levels?
- ☐ Same-day surgery or a hospital stay, and will the stay be inpatient or outpatient?
- ☐ Will I need a brace or a collar? When do I wear it, and for how long?
- ☐ Which limits apply to bending, lifting, twisting, sitting and driving? When does each end?
- ☐ When does therapy start: home visits, outpatient, or a home program?
- ☐ What is the plan for pain, constipation and blood clots?
- ☐ Who is the contact for problems at night or on a weekend?

SET UP THE HOME

- ☐ Everyday things within easy reach.
- ☐ A firm chair; get up every 20 to 30 minutes.
- ☐ A safe bathroom; ask about equipment.
- ☐ Throw rugs and loose cords out of the way.
- ☐ Help lined up for the first weeks.
- ☐ If you smoke, a plan to stop.

THE WALKS, WEEK BY WEEK

WEEK	LONGEST WALK	ANYTHING NEW?
1		
2		
4		
6		

Short walks only for the first 2 weeks, then a little farther as the surgeon allows. New weakness or numbness is not a log entry: call the surgeon.

AFTER SURGERY: ACT RIGHT AWAY

Bladder or bowel trouble: unable to urinate, leaking urine, losing bowel control, or new numbness between the legs, over the buttocks or in the inner thighs.	Emergency department now.
New or worsening weakness or numbness in the legs (back surgery), or in the arms, hands or legs, or new trouble walking (neck surgery).	Call the surgeon right away; emergency department if severe or worsening fast.
After neck surgery: trouble breathing, or neck swelling that is getting worse.	Call 911.
Possible clot: calf pain or swelling in the calf, ankle or foot; in the lung, sudden chest pain, shortness of breath or coughing.	Calf: call the surgeon. Chest: call 911.
Possible infection, or pain getting worse: redness, tenderness or swelling of the wound, drainage, more pain at the incision, worsening back pain that rest and pain medicine don't ease, chills, or a fever of 101°F or higher.	Call the surgeon right away.

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Scan or visit · kevineugenegroh.com/rehab/rehab-after-spine-surgery/

General education, not medical advice. It does not create a patient–provider relationship. Precautions, brace use and activity rules differ between surgeons, operations and patients: follow your own surgical team's instructions. The warning signs follow AAOS and MedlinePlus patient guidance; full sources are on the web page. Updated Nov 2026.