

CONNECTICUT NECK & BACK SPECIALISTS LLC

PREPARING FOR SPINE SURGERY

Learning that you need spine surgery can be a frightening realization, because all surgery carries risks as well as benefits. You've already taken a very important first step in choosing a surgeon and surgical team that you can trust. Here at Connecticut Neck & Back Specialists, our doctors are well respected and well trained. We specialize in spine surgery, and we pledge to use our skills and training to the best of our abilities. We will also educate you about your condition and the surgical plan, including associated risks, possible complications and expected outcomes. However, even the most successful and technically prepared surgical team cannot compensate for your important role in getting ready for surgery. Your physical and mental preparedness for the operation can have a major impact on surgical success and recovery. Depending on the amount of time you have before your surgery, there are many things that you can do to maximize your chance of a positive experience.

Physical Readiness~ It is important that your body be as healthy as possible before undergoing the stress of any surgery. We will assess your overall health to identify any concerns in your medical history that could create complications or added surgical risk. We may also ask you to improve your health prior to surgery by making nutritional improvements, losing weight, exercising, or stopping smoking.

Weight Loss~ If you are overweight, you may want to take steps to safely lose weight prior to your surgery through healthy eating and exercise. Excess weight causes additional stress to the spine that can make post-operative healing more difficult and can cause more pain in the recovery process. If you have a lot of weight to lose, be sure to consult your doctor for supervision.

Exercise~ Exercise can help you prepare for surgery. Exercise also boosts your immune system and contributes to an overall sense of well-being. Almost everyone can safely adopt some form of activity prior to surgery to increase strength and stamina. Depending on your condition and the level of pain you experience, walking, swimming, water aerobics, or light weight-training exercises can be beneficial. A physical therapist may be helpful in designing an activity program that is right for you

Stopping Smoking~ If you are a smoker, quitting this habit can be the single most important change that you make prior to surgery. Smoking significantly increases your chance of surgical complications. It compromises your immune system, can adversely affect you during the anesthesia process, and can contribute to lung difficulties such as pneumonia during your recovery. Studies show that fusion rates are much less successful among smokers. Stopping smoking prior to surgery and during recovery can improve your health and your surgical outcome significantly.

Mental Readiness~ In addition to physically preparing for spine surgery, it is important that you are mentally and emotionally prepared for your operation. We want to make sure that you know what to expect in each step of the process. We also want you to be aware of the many practical and logistical details that you may need to take care of before surgery.

Support Persons~ You will need to identify a friend, family member, or support person to drive you to and from the hospital for your surgery. You may also need someone to stay with you at home for at least the first day or two after your surgery to assist you with personal care, meals, and necessary errands. Depending on your condition, the type of surgery, and your individual circumstances, you may need to arrange for professional home care for a longer period of time.

Preparing Your Home~ It is a good idea to prepare your home for your post-operative recovery needs. You may be temporarily restricted from bending, stooping, or heavy lifting, so place necessary objects such as your telephone, food, toiletries and medicine within easy reach. You may also want to rearrange your furniture so that you don't need to climb stairs, and remove rugs that might trip you. Depending on your condition, you may need to obtain special equipment for walking and bathing that your doctor, nurse or physical therapist can prescribe.

Recovery Plans~ It is important that you have realistic expectations about your post-operative recovery. If you need to wear a brace after surgery, you may be fitted for it prior to your procedure. We will also discuss with you how long you may be hospitalized; what temporary or long-term restrictions you may have after surgery, and when you may be able to return to work or other activities.

Consent Forms~ You will need to sign consent forms showing that you understand the proposed surgical procedure and that you agree to it. We will make sure that you understand your medical history; the type of surgical procedure suggested; the type of anesthesia we will use; the risks, benefits, and potential complications; and the expected plan for your hospitalization, post-operative pain management, rehabilitation and recovery.

Final Pre-Surgery Preparation~ In the final days leading up to your surgery, you will receive detailed instructions from us about your medication schedule, blood donations, and how to prepare for your admission to the hospital. These instructions vary depending on your individual circumstances, but in general you may want to consider the following issues.

Blood Donations~ Many patients choose to donate their own blood to be stored for their needs during surgery. Other patients obtain blood donations from a donor with a compatible blood type. If you donate your own blood, you will need to plan your blood donations to begin two to four weeks prior to surgery.

Hospital Admission~ When you go the hospital for your surgery, it is a good idea to wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothes and shoes that are easy to take on and off. If you will be staying overnight in the hospital, bring a small bag with underwear, nightwear, slippers or loafers, and personal toiletries. If you will be wearing a brace after surgery, you will need a cotton t-shirt to wear under the brace. Leave your jewelry and watches at home, and remove your rings. When you arrive at the hospital, you will be asked to change into a hospital gown. Your visitors will be asked to wait in the waiting area. Medical staff will review your vital signs and start an IV prior to taking you into surgery.

Conclusion~ Although the prospect of surgery can be daunting, we are experienced in helping our patients through this process. If you have the time to prepare for your surgery physically and mentally, it can greatly enhance your overall sense of well-being and the outcome of your procedure. Be sure to listen to and follow our instructions so that you are ready for surgery, and don't hesitate to ask us if you have any questions.