

Minerva Cervical Orthosis

Quick Reference:

Wear your Minerva brace:

- until your Spine Physician says you can stop wearing it.
- at all times (including at night when sleeping, when getting up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, and when in the shower).
- only during the day when you are up and out of bed (including when getting up to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night, and when in the shower).
- when sleeping, wear your Soft Collar.
- put the Minerva brace on and take it off when you are lying flat on the bed.
- put the Minerva brace on and take it off when you are in a sitting position.



Fitting the Brace

Your Orthotist will fit the brace; once it has been sized do not make any changes. If it is not fitting comfortably, your Occupational Therapist may be able to make small adjustments. However, only the Orthotist may make a major adjustment. If you are uncomfortable while you are in the hospital, ask for the occupational therapist. If you require follow-up once you are home from the hospital, please call the Orthotics Department (located at GF Strong Rehabilitation Centre, 4255 Laurel Street, Vancouver) at 604-737-6477. When you no longer require the brace, you may donate it to the Orthotics Department. Your brace will be recycled.

Wearing the Brace

The Minerva brace is used to help stabilize your spine after injury or surgery. It helps to hold your spinal column in good alignment during the healing process.

On average, most people wear the brace for 6–12 weeks. You will be told how long you need to wear your brace based on your unique situation; only your spine physician may tell you when you can stop wearing the brace.

You will be taught how to put your brace on and take it off independently (and how to care for it in general). If you are unable to manage your brace independently, a friend or family member will be taught how to help you.

Applying and Removing the Brace

Keep your brace at your bedside so that you can easily reach it without getting up.

Put the back of the brace on first, then the front.

When you put on and take off the brace, you must remember to use the techniques taught to you by your therapists, and you must remember to keep your spine in a neutral alignment (that means keeping your head, neck and trunk in a straight line).

Back –

1. Start by lying flat on your back on your bed.
2. Fold the Velcro straps onto themselves so they do not become tangled.
3. Log roll to one side and place the back of the brace behind you. Place the brace so that it cups the base of your skull. Ensure it runs down the midline of your body before you roll back.
4. Roll onto your back. If the brace is out of alignment, make small body movements to adjust your alignment on top of the brace – this is easier than trying to move the brace. Do not press the back of your head into the bed to off-load the weight of your trunk. Only use your elbows and shoulders to bear weight.
5. Pull the Velcro straps out from under you.

Front –

1. Relax “into” the back piece of the brace and check your spinal alignment – make sure that you are in a neutral position (that means your head, neck and trunk are in a straight line).
2. Place the front of the brace on your chest and slide it up until it touches your chin.
3. One at a time, reach down for the chest strap, detach the Velcro from itself, and feed the strap through the metal ring located on the front piece. Hold each strap and evenly pull them to snug the brace around your trunk.
4. One at a time, reach up for the shoulder strap, detach the Velcro from itself, and feed the strap through the metal ring located on the front piece. Pull the strap to snug the brace over your shoulder. Over tightening this strap will pull the brace “up and into” your chin.
5. One at a time, reach up for the chin strap, detach the Velcro from itself, and feed the strap through the metal ring located on the front piece. Pull the strap to snug the brace under your chin. Over tightening this strap will pull the brace “into” your throat.
6. Reverse the procedure to remove the brace.

Adjusting the Brace When Up –

1. Once you are up, check the overall positioning and alignment of the brace in a mirror.
2. If an adjustment is needed, you may release and reattach the straps but only one strap at a time.

Checking the Fit –

When the brace has been properly applied:

- Your head, neck and trunk should be in a neutral position (that means in a straight line).
- Your chin should come to the front edge of the chin piece; the chin support should not be pressing into your throat.
- The back of your head should be against the back of the brace – you should not be able to “bob” back and forth between the head and chin supports.
- The front and back panels should appear level and symmetrical.
- When checking the fit, think to yourself “comfortable yet snug”.

Cleaning the Brace

Pads may be cleaned daily. Change the pads if they become visibly soiled or have an odour, or if they become moist. A second set of pads is available for purchase from the Orthotist. If you have them, change the pads for clean ones at this time and wash the dirty ones. Hand-wash the pads in the sink with warm water and a mild soap. Rinse thoroughly and squeeze the pads between towels to remove all excess water. Let the pads air-dry (about 6–8 hours). Never use bleach on the pads or put the pads in the washer or dryer. The plastic portion of the brace may be washed with mild soap and water. Rinse and towel dry the brace before re-attaching the clean pads.

Removing/Replacing the Pads

Front and Back pads –

Remove: Simply peel the pads off the Velcro dots.

Replace: Fold the pads in half and attach them so the fabric grips the Velcro dots. The plastic edges of the brace should not touch your skin; position the pads to make sure they overlap all the plastic edges.

Washing/Skin Care

Pressure, moisture, heat and dirt can lead to redness and soreness of your skin. To avoid skin breakdown, keep your skin clean, dry, and cool. If you notice redness (that remains even after the collar has been off for 10–15 minutes) or breakdown call your family doctor.

At least once a day, remove the brace and wash your face and neck. At this time, change the pads for clean ones and wash the dirty ones. If you have been instructed to wear your brace at all times, you may remove it once daily to clean the brace, change the pads, and wash your skin.

1. Before taking off your brace, gather the supplies you will need by your bedside: a washbasin, soap, washcloth, dry towels, and the clean replacement pads.
2. Remove the brace the way you were taught by your therapist. Unless your physician or therapist has given you other instructions, you must do this while laying flat on the bed.
3. While you wash, keep your head, neck and trunk straight and still. To wash your back, you may roll onto your side in the way you were taught to do so by your therapist.
4. Put your brace back on before you get up off the bed.

To wash your body, you may sponge bathe around the brace or you may take a full shower; you must wear the brace in the shower (unless otherwise directed by the physician or therapist).

When you are finished, clean your neck and face as described above. Clean the brace and replace the pads as described above. If you choose to not purchase the additional pads, you should shower just before going to bed so that the pads may be cleaned and then dry over night.

If you must wear your brace at all times, you can switch the pads for small towels when showering and while removing the pads for cleaning and drying.

Note – if you have had surgery and have an incision, before you shower, make sure you are aware of any restrictions or conditions related to incision care. This is very important; your nurse will teach you or a family member what you need to do to take proper care of your incision.

Payment

You will receive a bill from the hospital's Financial Services Department for the cost of the brace. If you have extended health benefits or other income support, you may be eligible for partial or full reimbursement. Please pay the hospital bill and then submit the receipt for review by your extended health benefits or other income support provider.

Program/Unit of Origin: The Department of Occupational Therapy, VGH
and Orthotics Department, G.F. Strong Centre

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