

Activity Guidelines after a Non-surgical Spinal Fracture

General Activity Considerations

The return to normal strength and activity after a spinal fracture is gradual and progressive. It is important that you remain active on a daily basis, but make sure to alternate periods of activity with periods of rest. Patients who find a balance between activity and rest say their overall experience is better – they say they have less pain, use less medication, move better, and get better sooner. A therapist will discuss your precautions and teach you to do the following movements and exercises safely and independently.

Pain

- Some pain is normal with movement.
- You may also feel some muscle spasms or cramping. Check with your nurse or doctor about appropriate medications to relieve pain and/or spasms.

Precautions

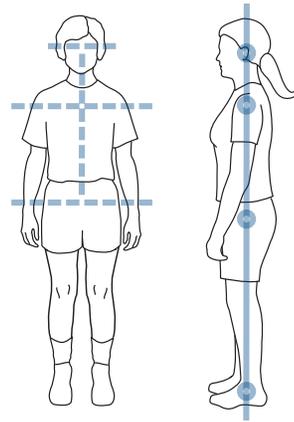
- You may move your spine into ranges of motion that are pain-free (i.e. bending forwards, tilting, or rotating).
- Minimize activity that has movements that are forceful or jerky (e.g. walking a dog that pulls on its leash).
- Do not do something that makes you push-and-pull, bend, twist, or reach too far (e.g. vacuuming, loading the dishwasher), especially if it is repetitive.
- Do not drive as long as you are required to wear a brace. If you do not have a brace, resume driving after discussing specific recommendations with your doctor. You must be able to safely and comfortably perform shoulder checks.

- You may resume sexual activity when you are comfortable. Avoid any positions which might place stress on your neck or back.
- Do not lift, push, pull, or carry anything that weighs more than 5 to 10 pounds. Discuss when you can increase this weight with your physician.
- When you must lift, push, pull or carry something, keep the item close to your body and between hip and shoulder levels.
- For the first 3 months after the date of injury, minimize holding your arms above your shoulders for prolonged periods of time.

How to maintain good posture

Maintaining a neutral spine posture throughout the day will help your fracture heal. It can also help decrease pain and muscle tightness. Throughout the day:

- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, or sit evenly on both sit bones.
- Imagine a string attached to the top of your head that is gently helping you become taller without causing any pain.
- Gently tighten your stomach muscles.
- Gently squeeze your shoulder blades together and down. Your shoulders should be lined up over your hips.
- Tuck your chin slightly so that your neck is lengthened.



How to position yourself in bed

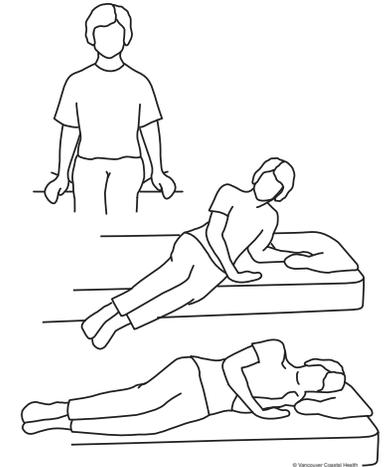
- When you are on your back, place one small pillow under your head. If you are prescribed a neck brace, you will be advised on what height the pillow should be.
- Bend your knees and support them with a pillow or bolster. Keep the bed flat.



- When on your side, place a small pillow under your head and one between your knees. Keep your knees bent and your back and neck straight.
- When changing positions, avoid twisting. Remember to log roll so that you keep your shoulders in line with your hips and legs while moving.

How to Get Out of Bed

- If you have a brace, put it on before you get out of bed.
- Bend your knees and then log roll onto your side.
- Lower your feet off the side of the bed and push up with your arms at the same time. This will keep your spine straight.
- Avoid twisting your back.
- Sit briefly on the edge of the bed before standing. This will ensure that you are not dizzy before you stand up which may cause a fall.



How to Get Into Bed

- Sit on the edge of the bed.
- Lie down on your side. Stay on your side or log roll onto your back.

Daily Exercises

Exercise for the first 3 months is limited to: performing basic daily activities (such as washing and dressing), walking, and core exercises described below. Perform only as instructed by your therapist. These exercises should cause minimal pain. If you are unable to do the exercises due to pain, consult your family doctor.

☐ Walking

Walking is one of the best exercises to help reduce pain, improve healing and speed up recovery.

- Start with frequent, short walks on level ground. Add small amounts of time every day.
- As your walks get longer, cut back the number of walks per day. This will allow you to increase your walking time and prevent getting too tired or sore.
- When walking, always keep your neutral spine posture and breathe in a relaxed manner.
- Wear comfortable footwear such as good walking shoes.
- Use railings and take one step at a time while using stairs. If you have concerns with managing stairs, discuss this with a therapist.

Recommended walk time _____

Number of walks per day _____

☐ Strengthen your deep neck muscles

There are small, deep muscles in your neck that keep your neck stable. After a neck fracture, these muscles can become weak.

- Lie or sit in a relaxed position while breathing in a relaxed manner. Relax your neck and shoulder muscles.



Relax these muscles

- Very gently nod your head a small amount. You will notice your neck lengthen as your chin moves towards your throat. You should feel a small amount of muscle activity deep inside the front of your neck. This is a small movement.



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- Stay relaxed and breathe normally. You should not feel neck strain or pain.

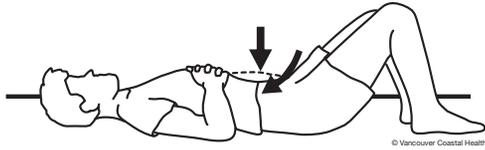
Hold each nod for _____ seconds

Repeat _____ times

Do these exercises _____ times per day

☐ Strengthen your deep core muscles

Your deep core muscles are important for maintaining good posture. It takes practice to feel these muscles working but they will get stronger with time.



- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the bed.
- Find your neutral spine posture. Keep breathing and stay relaxed.
- Place your fingertips on each side of your lower abdomen just inside your hip bones.
- Tighten your pelvic floor by gently “holding your pee” and gently try to pull your belly button in towards your spine. You should feel a gentle muscle tightening under your fingertips, but no movement of the spine.
- Remember to keep your upper body relaxed and keep breathing while you tighten these muscles.

Hold this muscle tightening for _____ seconds

Repeat _____ times

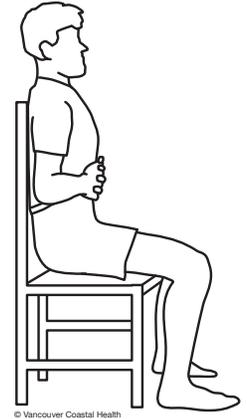
Do these exercises _____ times per day

As you become more comfortable with the exercise, try to hold the muscle tightening for longer periods of time. Also try this in different positions (sitting, standing, and walking).

☐ Diaphragmatic breathing

Your diaphragm is an important breathing muscle that can also help with the stability of your spine. Normal breathing will help with relaxation.

- Start in a relaxed position (example: lying in bed).
- Relax your neck and shoulders.
- Find your neutral spine.
- Place your hand on your stomach over the lower ribs.
- Breathe deeply in and out in a relaxed manner.
- Begin by slowly and gently breathing in over a count of two seconds. You should feel your hand rise as you breathe in. Then slowly let your breath out over two or more seconds. You should feel your lower ribs fall as you breathe out.



Repeat _____ times

Do these exercises _____ times per day

Contact your doctor or physiotherapist if:

- You have worsening or persistent numbness, tingling, pain, or weakness.
- Your brace is damaged in any way.
- You need advice on when to return to sport activities.

Resources

Osteoporosis Canada: www.osteoporosis.ca

For more copies, go online at <http://vch.eduhealth.ca> or
email pchem@vch.ca and quote Catalogue No. **FB.727.A48**
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