

# Rehabilitation after Spine Surgery

Moving is critical to a successful recovery. While rehabilitating at the CT Spine Institute, you will focus on walking, climbing stairs, getting in and out of bed, completing self-care tasks, and exercising.

## Spine Precautions

Therapists will emphasize “BLT” precautions:

- Avoid **B**ending
- Avoid **L**ifting more than 10 pounds
- Avoid **T**wisting

\*For neck surgery make sure to bring your arms and shoulders through a full range of motion every hour.

## Walking

Walking is one of the best exercises to assist in your recovery from spine surgery. Your first steps with the physical therapist will often be taken using a walker. Your goal is to regain enough strength and flexibility to eventually walk without the use of least supportive assistive device. At home walk hourly. Start with 3 minutes per hour and advance to 10 minutes per hour.

## Stair Climbing

The ability to go up and down stairs requires strength and flexibility. It is best practice to have a handrail at home. Plan to install one prior to surgery if not present. Your physical therapist can modify the technique if you have no rails; however, we ask that you have assistance available if no rails are present. Always lead with your stronger leg (good) going up the stairs, and your weaker leg (bad) when going down the stairs. If you are having weakness or neurological symptoms in both legs your PT will assist you with establishing an appropriate sequence for stair training.



**The problem with stair climbing is falling down the stairs.** This is particularly true immediately after the operation when you are the most unsteady. At first you need someone in front of you going down the stairs and someone behind when you are going up the stairs. This spotter should be able-bodied and preferably bigger and stronger than the patient. Once you are safe, the stairs should not be a major issue; but be smart and try to think ahead, keep the number of trips up and down the stairs to a minimum.

**Remember, “*up with the good*” and “*down with the bad.*”**

## Car Transfer

When performing car transfer move car seat back as far as it can go and recline seat about 30 degrees. Back up and hold onto car seat or dashboard for support. Lower yourself onto the seat being careful to avoid hitting your head on the roof of the vehicle. Slide back towards the driver's seat and lift your legs one at a time.



## Bed Mobility

### To Get out of Bed:

1. Roll onto your Side
  - Keep knees together.
  - Tighten abdominal muscles to prevent your back from arching.
  - Place hands on the bed in front of you.
2. Raise Body
  - Push upper body off bed as legs are lowered off bed.
  - Keep back straight and move body as one unit (logroll). Avoid bending or twisting.
  - Allow weight of legs to assist with transfer.



### To Get into Bed:

1. Lower onto your Side
  - Sit on side of bed
  - Lower down onto elbow
  - Bring both legs into bed at same time
  - Should be in side lying position
2. Roll onto your Back
  - Keep knees together
  - Roll onto back (logroll)
  - Straighten knees



Ice therapy is an excellent pain reliever. Keep ice on the wound but protect your skin with a dry towel and frequently check your skin to avoid frostbite. After neck surgery, it is a good idea to suck on ice chips or popsicles and to stay upright. You will be more comfortable if you sleep sitting up or in a lounge chair for the first 2-3 days.

## Self-Care

An Occupational Therapist will teach you how to dress, bathe, and complete toilet hygiene while abiding by your surgical spine precautions.

### 1. Do Not Bend

- Dressing: To avoid bending use a reacher to take your pants and underpants on and off. Use a reacher, sock aid or long handle shoehorn to take on and off your shoes and socks.
- Bathing: you may benefit from a long handle sponge to wash your lower leg and feet. A reacher can be used in assisting in drying below your knees (wrap and pinch towel in reacher). If your doctor applied a 'Silver Dressing' to your wound, sponge bathe keeping the dressing dry until you are given permission to remove it.



### 2. Do Not Twist

- Be cautious when wiping yourself. Do not twist to wipe after a bowel movement. Stand up or reach between your legs to wipe. Bend at the knees rather than at the hips. If you are unable to reach you will need a toilet aid (Fanwer) to reach all areas. Use flushable wipes if necessary.

## Equipment Recommendations

- Reacher
- Sock aid
- Long handle sponge
- Long handle shoehorn
- Elastic laces
- Shower chair/transfer bench
- Toilet Aid (fanwer)\*\*
- Raised Toilet Seat with arms\*\*
- Commode\*\*

\*Items can be purchased at any medical supply store or Amazon

\*\* not typically required after cervical spine surgery.