

Name of Child: _____ Date: _____

Going Home After a Spinal Fusion

Your child just had spinal fusion surgery. This procedure is done to fix scoliosis and helps reshape your child's spine. During this surgery, the surgeon makes an incision on your child's back and puts two metal bars on either side of the spine. The bars are fastened to the spine by screws and then rotated to take the curve out of your child's spine.

Here are some things that are important for children after they have spinal fusion surgery. Your child's nurse and surgeon will talk to you about these in more detail. If you have any questions, ask your child's nurse or surgeon.

- Pain medication is usually required on a regular basis. It is important not to take more than the prescribed dose of medication. It is also important not to take pain medicine more frequently than instructed.
 - If your child's pain is not under control, call your child's surgeon's office.
 - When ready to wean your child's pain medicine, wean the night time dose last.
 - Each child's recovery period is different. It usually takes 2 to 6 weeks for your child to not need narcotic or over-the-counter pain medicine.
- Bring extra pillows for the car ride home. Be prepared to take frequent breaks to have your child move around or stretch on your way home.
- Consider the layout of your child's bedroom, including the height and location of the bed. It is okay if your child wants to sleep on his or her side if it is comfortable.

- Some children may feel more comfortable sleeping in a recliner chair the first few days after surgery.
- If your child needs Magnetic Resonance Imaging (**MRI**), it is safe for your child. Make sure to tell the radiologist your child has had a spinal fusion.
- The metal rods will not set off airport metal detectors. However, you should tell airport security your child has a medical device.
- Your child may not drive for the first 6 weeks after spinal fusion. Your child must be off narcotics for at least 48 hours as well.

Activity:

- For the first 2 weeks only do light activity such as walking or riding in a car. Your child's surgeon will let you know what activities are safe for your child.
- Increase activity slowly. Take your child for a walk every day, and walk just a little longer distance or a little faster every day.
- During the first few weeks, your child may tire easily and need frequent naps.
- Most children return to normal activities in 3 months.
- The surgeon will let you know when it is okay for your child to return to playing sports. This is usually about 3 months or longer after your child's surgery.
- No swimming for at least 2 weeks and the incisions must be fully healed. Then, your child can do light activities in the pool, such as wading and sitting in the water. Your child's surgeon will tell you when your child can fully swim and do other activities such as diving into a pool.
- No lifting greater than 10 pounds for 3 months.

Going back to school if surgery is done during the school year:

- You should meet with the school nurse and counselor before your child is ready to go back to school. Your child may need to go back only half days at first.
- Your child cannot go back to school if still taking narcotic pain medicine. Your child must be off of narcotics for 48 hours before going back to school.
- Ask your child's school for an early pass to allow for extra time for travel between classes.

- Backpacks can be heavy. Your child should not lift any objects over 10 pounds for 3 months. Backpacks on wheels may be an option for your child. Some schools have a buddy system where a friend may be assigned to help carry your child's backpack as needed.
- Your child cannot participate in gym or physical education (P.E.) classes until cleared by your child's surgeon. Your child's surgeon can provide a note to the school if needed.

Incision care:

- Your child's surgeon will give you instructions on how to care for the incisions at home. If you do not understand these instructions, ask your child's nurse or doctor.
- Make sure your child and any caregivers practice good handwashing.
- ☐ For more information, ask your child's nurse or surgeon for the handout, **Good Handwashing #100**. (Check when done.)
- For the first 2 weeks after the surgery, do not use any lotions, oils, or powders on the incisions.
- For the first 2 weeks after the surgery, your child should not soak in a bathtub.
- Once a day for the first week after surgery, check the incision for signs of infection:
 - redness
 - swelling
 - pus (yellow drainage) from the incision

If you see any of these, call your child's surgeon.



Do not squeeze or open the incisions. If there is any problems, call the surgeon, no matter how long it has been since the surgery.

Constipation:

- Medicines such as narcotics can cause constipation. Your child may need an over-the-counter stool softener (such as Miralax[®] or Colace[®]) or a laxative (such as Milk of Magnesia[®]).
- Offer your child fluids to drink every 1 or 2 hours while awake to stay hydrated.
- Encourage your child to walk often. This can help with constipation by being active.
- If your child does not poop every 3-5 days, call the surgeon's office.

Diet:

- Eating many types of foods will give your child the nutrients to heal. Offer your child food he or she likes from all the food groups.
- For two or three weeks after surgery, some children eat less than usual. Offer your child small amounts of food several times a day until your child's appetite is back to normal.
- Make sure to give your child food each time your child takes narcotic pain medicine. This can help avoid side effects of the narcotic, such as nausea and upset stomach.

Follow-up care:

- Before you leave the hospital, make sure you know when to follow up with your child's surgeon. The surgeon needs to see how your child is doing after the surgery. Make sure you have the names and telephone numbers you need.
- Before you leave the hospital, fill your child's prescriptions. Make sure you have enough of your child's medicines to last until your child sees the surgeon again. If not, tell your nurse or surgeon you need prescriptions. Refills for narcotics usually cannot be called into the pharmacy and may require a paper prescription signed by your child's surgeon.

When to call the surgeon:

- If your child is having trouble breathing or you are concerned with your child's health, take your child to the nearest emergency room.



Call the surgeon if your child's pain is not under control or it gets worse.

Call the surgeon if your child has any of these in the first few weeks after surgery:

- pain that is not relieved by medication
 - loss of strength or sensation in your child's arms or legs
 - loss of bladder or bowel control
 - incision is red or swollen
 - more blood, fluid, or pus comes out of the incision site
 - incision is more painful
 - the site of surgery smells bad
 - is hard to wake up
 - temperature over 101° F
- For more information, ask your child's nurse or doctor for handout, **How to Take Your Child's Temperature, #533** . (Check when done.)

Now that you've read this:

- Tell your nurse or doctor how you will care for your child at home after the spinal fusion. (Check when done.)
- Tell your nurse or doctor when you need to call the surgeon's office. (Check when done.)



If you have any questions or concerns,
 call your child's doctor or call _____

If you want to know more about child health and illness,
visit our library at The Emily Center at Phoenix Children's Hospital
1919 East Thomas Road
Phoenix, AZ 85016
602-933-1400
866-933-6459
www.phoenixchildrens.org
Facebook: facebook.com/theemilycenter
Twitter: @emilycenter
Pinterest: pinterest.com/emilycenter

Disclaimer

The information provided at this site is intended to be general information, and is provided for educational purposes only. It is not intended to take the place of examination, treatment, or consultation with a physician. Phoenix Children's Hospital urges you to contact your physician with any questions you may have about a medical condition.

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#1761 • Written by Meredith Garrison, BSN, CPEN and Nicki Mitchell, MSN, CPN
• Illustrated by Dennis Swain

Going Home After a Spinal Fusion

Name of Health Care Provider: _____

Date returned: _____ db

Family Review of Handout

Health care providers: Please teach families with this handout.

Families: Please let us know what you think of this handout.

Would you say this handout is hard to read? Yes No

easy to read? Yes No

Please circle the parts of the handout that were hard to understand.

Would you say this handout is interesting to read? Yes No

Why or why not?

Would you do anything differently after reading
this handout? Yes No

If yes, what?

After reading this handout, do you have any
questions about the subject? Yes No

If yes, what?

Is there anything you don't like about the drawings?

Yes

No

If yes, what?

What changes would you make in this handout to make it better or easier to understand?

Please return your review of this handout to your nurse or doctor or send it to the address below.

The Emily Center
Health Education Specialist
Phoenix Children's Hospital
1919 East Thomas Road
Phoenix, AZ 85016-7710

602-933-1395

Thank you for helping us!