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INTRATHECAL PUMP REPLACEMENT

Post-operative instructions

Your intrathecal pain pump delivers medication directly into the fluid around the spinal cord. Pump batteries last for a limited number of years, so the pump must be replaced periodically. During replacement surgery, the old pump is removed through an incision over it, the catheter (the thin tube that delivers the medication) is checked and connected to the new pump, and the new pump is programmed and filled.

Please also read our handout **Preparing for Your Procedure**. The facility where your surgery is performed will contact you with your arrival time and its own pre-operative instructions.

SURGERY DAY AND GOING HOME

- Most patients go home the same day. After surgery, you will be monitored in the recovery area until you have recovered from anesthesia. You will be watched for about 2 to 3 hours after surgery to make sure your new pump is delivering the correct dose. You will go home only when you have recovered from anesthesia and we are confident the pump is working properly.
- **An adult driver must bring you, stay at the facility during your surgery, and drive you home.**
- A responsible adult should stay with you for at least the first 24 hours after you get home.
- For 24 hours after anesthesia, do not drive, drink alcohol, operate machinery, or sign important documents.

An adult must stay with you for 24 to 48 hours

Because your new pump is delivering medication directly to your spinal fluid, it is especially important that a responsible adult stay with you for at least the first **24 to 48 hours** after surgery to watch for signs of too much or too little medication.

CARE OF YOUR INCISION

You will have one incision over the location of your pump, usually in the lower abdomen.

Your incisions are closed with dissolving stitches under the skin. The skin is covered with either adhesive strips (Steri-Strips), which fall off on their own in about a week, or skin glue, or staples, which are removed in our office 10 to 14 days after surgery.

- **Leave the surgical dressing in place until your first wound check**, usually 2 to 3 days after surgery.
- After the wound check, you may shower once the incision has been clean and dry for 24 hours. Keep showers to 5 to 7 minutes. Let the water run gently over the incision; do not aim the shower spray directly at it.
- Do not scrub the incision or apply soap directly to it. Gently pat it dry; do not rub.

- Change the dressing daily for 10 days, or until all drainage has stopped, whichever is longer.
- Do not apply ointments, creams, powders, or other medications to the incision.
- **Do not soak the incision** in a bathtub, swimming pool, hot tub, or the Gulf for at least 6 weeks.
- A small amount of drainage for the first several days, mild swelling, and mild bruising are common. Call us if there is significant drainage, spreading redness, or a large amount of swelling.

PAIN AFTER SURGERY

Most patients have mild to moderate pain at the incision. Numbing medicine used during surgery usually wears off after 6 to 8 hours, so it is common for incision pain to increase that evening and the next day.

- Acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) is usually enough to control the pain, unless your physician tells you otherwise.
- Apply ice packs wrapped in a thin towel to the area for 15 to 20 minutes at a time as needed for discomfort and swelling. Never place ice directly on the skin.
- Pain medicine will not remove all of your discomfort. Some soreness at the incision is expected while you heal.

ACTIVITY

- Avoid bending or twisting at the waist and avoid tight waistbands or belts over the pump site while the incision heals.
- Unless told otherwise, focus on **gentle walking** for the first 2 weeks. Start with short walks in the house and gradually increase the time and distance.
- Limit stair climbing to 1 or 2 times a day for the first week.
- Avoid driving or riding in a car for long periods for the first 2 weeks. After that, start with short drives with another adult in the car. Never drive while taking prescription pain medication.
- Do not lift anything heavier than a half-gallon of milk (about 4 pounds) for the first 2 weeks. After that, you may begin lifting light objects if you are comfortable.
- **If it hurts, do not do it.** You may resume sexual activity when you feel comfortable.
- Physical therapy helps many patients recover. Talk with us before starting or returning to an exercise program.

DIET AND MEDICATIONS

- You may return to your regular diet right away.
- You may restart your regular medications right away, with these exceptions:
- **Aspirin:** restart the day after surgery unless your physician tells you otherwise.
- **Blood thinners** such as warfarin (Coumadin), clopidogrel (Plavix), apixaban (Eliquis), rivaroxaban (Xarelto), or dabigatran (Pradaxa): **we will tell you when to restart.** Then follow up with the doctor who prescribes your blood thinner.
- **Constipation** is common after surgery and anesthesia, especially if you take pain medication. Drink plenty of water. An over-the-counter stool softener or laxative, such as MiraLAX, can help.

RETURNING TO WORK

Most patients with light-duty jobs return to work 3 to 4 weeks after surgery. Patients whose jobs require heavy lifting or physical labor may need longer. We will discuss your return to work at your follow-up visit.

FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENTS

- **About 3 days after surgery:** wound check and dressing change in our office.
- **10 to 14 days after surgery:** second wound check and removal of staples, if you have them.
- **6 to 8 weeks after surgery:** routine follow-up visit.

YOUR PUMP

- Carry your new pump identification card at all times. **Keep every pump refill appointment.** Missed refills can cause the pump to run out, which can be dangerous.
- Tell every doctor, hospital, and imaging center that you have an intrathecal pump before any MRI, surgery, or procedure.

WHEN TO CALL US

Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room if you have:

- Extreme sleepiness, confusion, difficulty staying awake, or slow or shallow breathing (possible signs of too much medication)
- Weakness, paralysis, or inability to move your arms or legs
- Loss of control of your bladder or bowels
- Chest pain or difficulty breathing

Call our office right away if you have:

- A fever of 101°F or higher, or chills
- Redness, warmth, swelling, or drainage from the incision, or an incision that opens
- Increasing back or leg pain
- Difficulty urinating
- New numbness, weakness, or a change in your symptoms compared with before surgery
- Signs of too little medication, such as a sudden return of pain, sweating, restlessness, anxiety, itching, or muscle spasms. **If your pump contains baclofen, sudden high fever, confusion, or severe muscle stiffness is an emergency; call 911.**
- A pump alarm (beeping)
- Swelling or a fluid collection around the pump or along the spine
- A headache that is worse when you sit or stand

Questions or Concerns

Call Coastal Spine & Pain at **(251) 291-2311**, Monday through Thursday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

For a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

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