

# Lumbar Laminectomy: What to Expect at Home

## Your Recovery

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A lumbar laminectomy is surgery to ease pressure on the spinal cord and nerves of the lower spine. The doctor took out pieces of bone that were squeezing the spinal cord and nerves.

You can expect your back to feel stiff or sore after surgery. This should improve in the weeks after surgery. You may have trouble sitting or standing in one position for very long.

Your doctor may advise you to work with a physical therapist to strengthen the muscles around your spine and trunk. You will need to learn how to lift, twist, and bend so that you don't put too much strain on your back.

This care sheet gives you a general idea about how long it will take for you to recover. But each person recovers at a different pace. Follow the steps below to get better as quickly as possible.

## How can you care for yourself at home?

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### Activity

- Rest when you feel tired. Getting enough sleep will help you recover.
- Try to walk each day. Start by walking a little more than you did the day before. Bit by bit, increase the amount you walk. Walking boosts blood flow and helps prevent pneumonia and constipation. Walking may also decrease your muscle soreness after surgery.
- If advised by your doctor, you may need to avoid lifting anything that would cause excessive strain on your back. This may include a child, heavy grocery bags and milk containers, a heavy briefcase or backpack, cat litter or dog food bags, or a vacuum cleaner.
- Avoid strenuous activities, such as bicycle riding, jogging, weight lifting, or aerobic exercise, until your doctor says it is okay.
- Do not drive for 2 to 4 weeks after your surgery or until your doctor says it is okay.
- Avoid riding in a car for more than 30 minutes at a time for 2 to 4 weeks after surgery. If you must ride in a car for a longer distance, stop often to walk and stretch your legs.
- Try to change your position about every 30 minutes while sitting or standing. This will help decrease your back pain while you are healing.
- You will probably need to take 2 to 4 weeks off from work. But if your job requires physical labor, it may take 4 to 8 weeks. It depends on the type of work you do and how you feel.
- You may have sex as soon as you feel able, but avoid positions that put stress on your back or cause pain.



## Diet

- You can eat your normal diet. If your stomach is upset, try bland, low-fat foods like plain rice, broiled chicken, toast, and yogurt.
- Drink plenty of fluids (unless your doctor tells you not to).
- You may notice that your bowel movements are not regular right after your surgery. This is common. Try to avoid constipation and straining with bowel movements. You may want to take a fiber supplement every day. If you have not had a bowel movement after a couple of days, ask your doctor about taking a mild laxative.



## Medicines

- Your doctor will tell you if and when you can restart your medicines. You will also get instructions about taking any new medicines.
- If you stopped taking aspirin or some other blood thinner, your doctor will tell you when to start taking it again.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
  - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
  - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
- If you think your pain medicine is making you sick to your stomach:
  - Take your medicine after meals (unless your doctor has told you not to).
  - Ask your doctor for a different pain medicine.



## Incision care

- If you have strips of tape on the cut (incision) the doctor made, leave the tape on for a week or until it falls off.
- Wash the area daily with warm, soapy water and pat it dry.
- Keep the area clean and dry. You may cover it with a gauze bandage if it weeps or rubs against clothing. Change the bandage every day.



## Exercise

- Do back exercises as instructed by your doctor.
- Your doctor may advise you to work with a physical therapist to improve the strength and flexibility of your back.



## Other instructions

- To reduce stiffness and help sore muscles, use a warm water bottle, a heating pad set on low, or a warm cloth on your back. Do not put heat right over the incision. Do not go to sleep with a heating pad on your skin.

**Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety.** Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

## When should you call for help?

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**Call 911** anytime you think you may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- You passed out (lost consciousness).
- You have sudden chest pain and shortness of breath, or you cough up blood.
- You are unable to move a leg at all.

**Call your doctor now** or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have new or worse symptoms in your legs or buttocks. Symptoms may include:
  - Numbness or tingling.
  - Weakness.
  - Pain.
- You lose bladder or bowel control.
- You have loose stitches, or your incision comes open.
- You have blood or fluid draining from the incision.
- You have signs of infection, such as:
  - Increased pain, swelling, warmth, or redness.
  - Pus draining from the incision.
  - A fever.
  - Red streaks leading from the incision.

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You do not have a bowel movement after taking a laxative.
- You are not getting better as expected.

## Where can you learn more?

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Go to <https://www.healthwise.net/patiented>

Enter **U123** in the search box to learn more about "**Lumbar Laminectomy: What to Expect at Home**".

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