

# NEUROSURGICAL CONSULTANTS, INC.

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SPINAL SURGERY  
CRANIAL SURGERY  
MICRONEUROSURGERY  
SPINAL INSTRUMENTATION

## Interspinous Process Spacer Implant

The doctors of Neurosurgical Consultants want to keep you informed about your hospital stay and discharge. Please review this information and talk with your doctor(s) or the hospital staff about your progress.

**What is an Interspinous Spacer Implant?** An Interspinous Spacer is a device placed between the spinous processes of the lumbar spine (the pointed bone that protrudes backward and can be felt under the skin) to control movement between the vertebrae when bending backwards. It is used to control pain from spinal stenosis (a narrowing of the tube in the spine where the nerves are).

**Description of Surgery:** Intravenous antibiotics are administered before surgery to decrease the risk of infection. You will be anesthetized (put to sleep), and turned face down on the operating table for the surgery. After making the skin incision, muscle is carefully dissected off the spine. A small amount of bone may need to be removed to facilitate the implantation of the Interspinous Spacer device. The correct level for implantation is identified using fluoroscopy (live X-ray with a monitor). Fluoroscopy is also used to guide the neurosurgeon during the steps of the implantation.

The wound is then irrigated with antibiotic solution to decrease the risk of infection. Absorbable stitches are used under the skin to close the incision. Stitches, staples, or a special "skin glue" are used on the surface of the skin. A sterile dressing is placed over the incision. You will then be placed on your back in a hospital bed. The breathing tube will be removed (extubated) and you will be taken to the recovery room.

**How will your family know when the surgery is completed?** Your neurosurgeon will speak with your family members in the family waiting area or call them at home when the surgery has been completed.

## What to Expect After Surgery

**Day of Surgery:** Following the surgery you will spend one to two hours in the Recovery Room (PACU). From there you will be taken to a regular hospital room or to the Day Surgery area, where you will be monitored by nurses who specialize in caring for surgical patients. The nurses will monitor your temperature, blood pressure, pulse, respirations and neurological functions. Visitors are not allowed in the Recovery Room, but family and friends can visit when you are sent to a regular hospital room or the Day Surgery area.

- The nurses will give pain medicine as needed, initially by vein and later by mouth.
- When you are ready, you will be allowed to eat. It is not uncommon to feel nauseous after surgery. This is due to the anesthesia. Medicine is available to help relieve the nausea and any vomiting.
- Some people have difficulty urinating after surgery. If this occurs, a small catheter will be temporarily placed in the bladder.
- Activity: You will be encouraged to walk as soon as you are comfortable and able. Walking helps prevent blood clots from forming in the legs after surgery. You should avoid bending over, sitting for more than 1 hour, or lifting anything heavier than 5 pounds.
- Constipation often occurs from the use of narcotic pain medications. Stool softeners and other medications may be needed to help prevent constipation.
- After surgery, it is important to do deep breathing exercises. This prevents pneumonia from developing. You will use a device called an incentive spirometer to help you deep breathe.
- Discharge: You can plan on going home between the first and third post operative day. Some patients, especially those who live alone, may need to spend some time in a rehabilitation center for a week or two after surgery.

## Once You Are Home

**When to call the doctor?** One of the three neurosurgeons from Neurosurgical Consultants Inc. is on call each day. This means that if needed, your neurosurgeon or his covering associate can be reached 24 hours a day. Call the Norwood office at (781) 769 - 4640 if there is drainage from the wound, a fever greater than 101 degrees Fahrenheit, new weakness, numbness, or pain the same or worse than before surgery. Patients may experience some pain or tingling radiating down their leg for several days after surgery. This is caused by nerve swelling and should subside within a few days.

**Pain Medication:** You should only need narcotic medication, such as Percocet or Vicodin, for incisional pain during the first few days after surgery. Extra strength Tylenol should be sufficient to control any pain after the first few days and certainly by the end of the week.

**How do I care for my surgical incision?** There will be a gauze or Mepilex dressing secured with silk or clear plastic tape. Under the dressing will be either stitches or skin glue, possibly

covered by Steri-Strips; or skin staples. Steri-Strips are small pieces of special tape that will fall off on their own once they start getting wet, typically 7-10 days after surgery.

The skin glue is clear synthetic glue that holds the skin edges together and acts as an impermeable barrier to water. It will start to flake off 7-10 days after surgery.

You may shower after 5 days, but must take precautions to keep the dressing dry. This can be done by covering the dressing and at least 4 inches of surrounding skin with heavy plastic, such as from a clean, heavy garbage bag, secured with 2 inch tape applied on all sides completely sealing the edges.

If you have a Mepilex (silver impregnated) dressing, it should be left in place for 5 days and then can be removed. After removal, the wound can be left open. However, if desired, it can be re-dressed with gauze for patient comfort. If the dressing gets wet, it **should** be removed and replaced with a clean, dry gauze dressing.

If you have a gauze dressing, it may be removed after 5 days. After removal, the wound can be left open. However, if desired, it can be re-dressed with gauze for patient comfort. If the dressing gets wet, it **should** be removed and replaced with a clean, dry gauze dressing.

If you have Steri-Strips, the operative area and Steri-strips should be covered with plastic to keep the area dry during a shower. This can be done by covering the operative area, Steri-strips, and at least 4 inches of surrounding skin with heavy plastic, such as from a clean heavy garbage bag, secured with 2 inch tape applied on all sides completely sealing the edges. After 5 days you no longer need to protect the Steri-strips during shower.

Patients may shower but should not bathe or swim for at least 3 weeks. Your incision should not be immersed in water until all scab has fallen off.

## Activity

The following is a guide to activity levels while you are recovering. Running and impact exercises should be avoided for at least three months.

### **Weeks 1 - 2:**

Unlimited walking is permitted. You may walk up stairs. Sitting is alright, but avoid prolonged sitting, as this may cause discomfort. Do not lift any object greater than 5 pounds. You should not drive, but you may ride as a passenger. You may have sexual relations when you feel that you are ready. During sexual relations, you should avoid positions that cause discomfort, as this may cause re-injury.

### **Week 3:**

Unlimited walking is permitted. You may walk up stairs. Sitting is alright, but avoid prolonged sitting, as this may cause discomfort. Do not lift any object greater than 10 pounds. If you feel that you have full function of your legs with no impairment, you may resume driving. If there is any weakness or sensory deficit, such as numbness or tingling, you should not drive. When you initially start to drive, stay close to home and avoid peak traffic. Slowly work your way up to more extensive driving. During sexual relations, avoid positions that cause discomfort, as this may cause re-injury.

**Week 4:**

At this point you should have your post-operative visit. Make sure to discuss issues such as physical therapy and returning to work. Many people can return to work sooner if no lifting or bending is involved. If your goal is to return to work earlier, it should be discussed with your neurosurgeon pre-operatively. In general, let your body "tell" you what to do. If you do something that is uncomfortable or makes you ache later, you know you have done too much.

## **Your Future**

Remember, once you have back surgery, you are more susceptible to future back strain. However, with regular back strengthening exercises, a healthy diet, smoking cessation and avoiding potentially harmful activities, you can live an active, comfortable, and productive life.

These instructions are meant to be a guide to recovery from Interspinous Spacer Implantation Surgery for patients in our practice. We hope that you find them helpful. They are not a substitute for medical care by a professional. Also, other neurosurgeons may have different routines. For more information, visit our Web Site, <http://www.neurosurgical-consult.com>.

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