Activity Guidelines Following Thoracic/Lumbar Spine Surgery

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These are the guidelines for activities for the first two months following your spine surgery. Physical therapy and occupational therapy play an important role in the recovery process. The goal is for you to be independent and safe in your daily activities.

Brace

- **LSO (lumbosacral orthosis):** Wear for comfort only.
- **TLSO (thoracolumbosacral orthosis):** Wear brace whenever out of bed for about three months after surgery or until cleared by your doctor. Remove brace only for showering and bathing.
  
  Apply brace: ___ in bed; ___ in sitting or standing position

Precautions ‘BLT’

- No Bending of your back.
- No Lifting/push/pull -- more than 5 to 10 pounds.
- No Twisting your back.
- No sitting more than 40 minutes at a time.
- No hip bending more than 90 degrees, IF your surgery included sacral fusion.

Discharge Goals

You should be able to:

- State the spine precautions and maintain the precautions and proper body mechanics during functional activities.
- Put on and take off your brace, with help if needed.
- Get in and out of bed independently with head of bed flat.
- Perform chair, toilet, shower and car transfers independently.
- Perform activities of daily living safely - such as dressing, toileting, bathing, etc
- Walk at least 200 feet, with an assistive device if needed, and safely manage stairs as needed.
**Progression of Activities**

After your discharge from the hospital, your activity will be limited while your spine is healing. Healing time depends on your surgery. Your doctor will explain healing time and safe progression of activity. Be sure to ask your doctor about any activities that you wish to pursue. Do not drive until approved by your doctor, typically after six weeks.

**Walking is the best exercise during the first six weeks.** Walking is great to increase your strength and general endurance, and to promote healing. Start with walking five to 10 minutes at least three times a day. Increase your walking by five minutes each day until you are walking 20 to 30 minutes one or two times a day. Wear good shoes and walk on even, flat surfaces.

If indicated, you will start outpatient physical therapy 2 months after your surgery. Check with your doctor on your first clinic visit.

**Dressing with Spine Precautions**

- Do not bend toward the floor to pick up dropped items; use a reacher.
- To put on lower body clothes, sit upright in a chair and cross one leg over the other without bending your back. If this position is uncomfortable, you can use adaptive equipment to dress. Your therapist will instruct you.
- If your surgery involved the sacrum, you must use adaptive equipment.

**Bathing**

- Make sure your doctor clears you to shower.
- You must wear your brace while getting in and out of the shower or tub; the brace should be removed only while bathing.
- Use a non-slip mat on the floor of the tub or shower to prevent falls.
- You may use a long-handled sponge to wash your feet or back.
- You may stand to shower or use a shower stool or bench.

**Toileting**

- If standing to wipe is difficult, try bending your knees to achieve greater reach.
- You may use a toilet aid to hold the toilet paper to achieve extended reach.
- A designated long-handled sponge and baby wipes can make cleaning easier.
- Toileting aids are available if needed. Ask your therapist for suggestions.
- A raised commode will make it easier to get on and off the toilet.

**Home Management**

- Place frequently used items on countertops or at waist height.
- Slide heavy items along the countertop instead of lifting.
- Use your reacher to pick up hard-to-reach objects that are below knee level or above shoulder height.
- When possible, sit for kitchen activities to ensure correct posture.
- Your therapist can instruct you on safely completing other specific tasks.