

Looking after your neck following surgery



Information for patients

Therapy Services



PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



What precautions must I be aware of following my neck surgery?

- It is important not to lift heavy objects after your surgery for at least six weeks. For example, manual handling at work, lifting weights, moving furniture at home and heavy shopping should all be limited.
- Good posture should be adopted at all times. If pain is experienced in your neck after surgery, then you must stop immediately and re-position yourself. If the pain persists, then you should seek advice from your GP or the hospital staff.
- It is important to protect your spine during the recovery process. You must try to avoid excessive or sudden movements of the neck, including those in a forward direction, backwards or twisting for 6 weeks.

How should I lie in bed?

It is advisable for you to lie on your side or back following your surgery. Use no more than one or two pillows. The therapists or nursing staff who get you out of bed will explain the recommended technique for getting in/out of bed through side lying.

How do I look after my wound?

The best advice is to leave your wound alone. The nurse caring for you will give you advice regarding your wound.

Do I need to wear a collar?

Some people are advised to wear a collar after surgery. If this is necessary, you will be informed after surgery and will be fitted for a collar by the physiotherapist or nursing staff on the ward. Specific instructions will be given regarding the length of time the collar needs to be worn. Cleaning instructions can be found on the care label or leaflet accompanying the collar. You must not drive whilst wearing a collar.

Can I move my neck?

If you do not need a collar you can gently move your neck as comfort allows. You must avoid excessive movements of your neck and you should also avoid any movements that cause pain.

If you have been advised to wear a collar, this will restrict your movement.

How should I carry out everyday activities?

The following advice should be followed for the first 6 weeks to allow your neck to heal.

- We recommend using a shower for washing wherever possible. We do not recommend you sit in the bottom of the bath for the first 6 weeks. You will be able to discuss any concerns regarding your ability to get in / out of the bath with your therapist on the ward.
- You should not wash your hair over a basin or at the sink at the hairdressers. Instead, you can wash it whilst upright in the bath or shower, keeping your head upright.
- When shaving, have everything close to hand and stand directly in front of the mirror. If you have a collar, remove it and shave as closely as possible, avoiding excessive movements of the head. An electric razor may be easier.
- If you are experiencing difficulties with washing, dressing or handling cutlery due to decreased grip or sensory changes in your hands, please speak to your therapist. They can advise you on different ways of doing the task or explain how equipment can make it easier.
- When dressing, or reaching up to shelves or cupboards, you shouldn't lift both arms straight above your head at the same time. Have items used frequently below shoulder level if possible.
- Avoid any household task that involves lifting with both hands e.g carrying the vacuum cleaner up stairs, changing beds, or carrying heavy loads of laundry or shopping bags. In the kitchen you could slide heavy pans along the work surface, fill pans with a jug or cook vegetables in a wire basket inside the pan so they are easier to drain.

Will there be any restrictions to my social life?

- Heavy activities such as housework, DIY, gardening or car maintenance should be avoided for at least six weeks.
- Contact sports should be avoided until discussed further with your consultant or his team at the follow up appointment.
- Sexual activity can be resumed so long as you follow advice on avoiding excessive neck movements.

Your therapist can give you specific advice on any activities as required.

General mobility

After any period of immobility due to injury, illness or an operation your exercise tolerance will be lower and you will be more at risk of circulatory problems.

Try to remain as active and mobile as you can after discharge from hospital, this helps to maintain good circulation and joint and muscle health.

Take adequate periods of rest through the day to aid recovery.

Try to do shorter periods of activity more often rather than too much in one go.

Progress your activity levels gradually and progressively as your recovery allows.

Can I drive?

It is the responsibility of the driver to ensure that he / she is in control of the vehicle at all times. Drivers should check their insurance policy before returning to driving after surgery.

Patients should inform the DVLA if their symptoms are likely to affect safe driving and persist for longer than three months after the date of surgery.

You are advised not to drive when wearing a collar. If you are not required to wear a collar you may return to driving in 2-3 weeks (unless you have been advised differently by your consultant). If you have any concerns please discuss them with your consultant or his/her team in the follow up appointments.

When can I go back to work?

This depends on the type of job you have, but as a general rule, you can return to a desk type job at around 4 weeks, whereas a more physically demanding job may take at least 6 weeks to get back into.

You will have a follow-up outpatient appointment with the medical staff at around 6 weeks, during which time it can be useful to address any further questions. It may be helpful to jot down any questions you have before your appointment. If you have any problems at home in the meantime, contact your GP or the ward for advice.

Useful contacts:

Your consultant:

Your therapist:

Ward N2:

- **0114 271 2891**

DVLA:

- **0300 790 6806**
- <https://www.gov.uk/browse/driving/disability-health-condition>



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