Success of the Surgery

After your spinal cord stimulator surgery, you will work closely with your spinal cord stimulator representative in the post-operative course who will be available for any technical questions you may have concerning the management of your new stimulator. The representatives will do all teaching and education regarding the spinal cord stimulator prior to your discharge from the hospital. You will see your pain management physician 1 week after surgery for management of your pain medications, and you will see your surgeon for your first post-operative appointment 2 weeks after surgery. Success of this surgery depends on this integrated approach.

Expected Hospital Stay

Most patients will be expected to leave the hospital the same day of the surgery. After the procedure, you will stay in the post-op unit where you will be monitored closely. Once you receive education on how to use the programmer and have had the device programmed by your representative, you will then be able to leave the hospital.

Care of Your Incision

You will have two incisions. One located at the center of your spine usually in the mid to upper back region. The other incision will be located in the right or left upper buttock area. The buttock incision is the site where the battery will be surgically placed, and you will decide prior to surgery which side you prefer for the battery. Both incisions will be closed in the same manner.

Your incisions will be closed with buried stitches that will dissolve within a couple of weeks. Strips of adhesive tape called Steri-Strips will be placed over your incisions and will fall off on their own over the course of a week.

The surgical dressings should be left on for 3 days after surgery. Then after 3 days, you may shower but you should not scrub your incision or soak in a pool, hot tub or tub bath for at least two weeks. It is ok to gently pat it dry.

Slight drainage the first day or so, limited swelling or mild bruising is common and usually not of concern. If there is significant leaking or any marked redness or a large amount of swelling you should call the office.

Post-op Pain Management

Most patients after spinal cord stimulator surgery complain of pain and discomfort at the incisional sites. During the surgery, local anesthetic will be used at the site of the incisions and the pain relief effect should last about 6 hours. It is not uncommon to have incisional pain or discomfort later that evening and especially the day after surgery.

A postoperative pain medication plan will be discussed at the preoperative appointment, and the “West Bay Orthopaedics & Neurosurgery Pain Management Agreement” will be discussed at that time.

In the post-operative period, heat or ice packs may be used as necessary for incisional discomfort and swelling. However, it is important to understand that post-op pain medications will not take 100% of your pain away, and it is common to still feel discomfort at the incisional sites while taking pain medication.

Activity

Unless you have been instructed otherwise, you should focus on gentle walking the first 2 weeks after the surgery. You should start with brief walks in the house, and gradually increase the time and speed of your walks. It is best to limit stair walking to 1 or 2 times a day for the first week. As you feel better, you should start to take longer walks outside and up inclines. You should avoid driving or being in the car for the first 2 weeks. After that, start with short drives with another person in the car. You should avoid lifting anything heavier than a half gallon of milk for the first 2 weeks. After that, you can start to lift light objects if you are comfortable. Remember-if it hurts, don’t do it! Sexual activity can be resumed when you feel comfortable. You can discuss returning to an exercise regimen with your physical therapist. For most patients, working with a physical therapist after the surgery can help with the recovery process.
Diet and medication

You can resume your regular diet immediately after the surgery. Your regular medications may be restarted right away. However, aspirin is usually started the day after surgery unless otherwise instructed by your surgeon. If you are taking an anticoagulant or “blood thinner” such as warfarin (coumadin), plavix (clopidogrel), pradaxa (dabigatran), or any other anticoagulant medication, you will be told when to restart the medication. You should then follow-up with the doctor who prescribes the anticoagulant medicine. Constipation is a common problem after spine surgery. Over the counter stimulants and stool softeners can be beneficial, along with plenty of fresh water.

Work

Most patients with lighter duty jobs return to work 6-8 weeks after the surgery. Patients whose jobs require heavy lifting may take longer. Your return to work will be discussed in your office follow-up appointment.

Follow up Appointments

You will meet with your pain management physician 1 week after surgery for management of your pain medications. Your first surgical post-op appointment will be 2 weeks after surgery. For that appointment you will have an x-ray of your spine, and you should also bring your device programmer and/or recharger with you. The representative from the company will meet you at your post-op appointment to provide any teaching or programming if needed.

What to Watch Out For

These symptoms should cause you to call immediately or dial 911 to come to the emergency department

- Paralysis or inability to fully move your legs
- Severe chest pain, difficulty breathing
- Loss of control of your bowels and bladder

The following symptoms may indicate a problem. You should call the office number listed below.

- Fever higher than 101 F
- Increasing back and/or leg pain
- Difficulty passing urine
- New numbness or change in symptoms from before surgery
- Redness or drainage from the incision
- Unusual headache, especially if it is much worse when you stand up

For questions after the surgery, please call 739-4988. After hours, the answering service will respond and page the doctor in an emergency.