

PAIN MANAGEMENT AFTER LOWER BACK SURGERY

What to Expect and When to Call Your Doctor
Recovery takes time. Pain and healing change over time. Use this guide to learn what is normal, how to manage pain, and when to get help.

HEALING TAKES TIME
SMALL STEPS LEAD TO BIG GAINS
YOUR CARE TEAM IS HERE TO HELP

PATH OF RECOVERY

PHASE 1
Days 1 through 3
Highest pain, more swelling
Pain and swelling usually are the worst during the first 2 to 3 days.

PHASE 2
Weeks 1 and 2
Pain gradually improves
Pain, stiffness, and soreness slowly get better.

PHASE 3
Weeks 3+
Continued healing and increased strength
Mild pain and swelling may continue as your back heals.

RECOVERY IS NOT A STRAIGHT LINE
Some days will feel better than other days. Ups and downs are normal.

NORMAL RECOVERY: WHAT TO EXPECT

 Soreness and Aching <small>From healing tissues and muscles</small>	 Stiffness <small>Common in the morning or after sitting</small>	 Activity-Related Pain <small>May increase with activity and improve with rest</small>	 Swelling <small>Around the incision or surgery area</small>
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HOW PAIN IS CONTROLLED
More than one method may be used to manage pain (multimodal pain control).

 Pain Medications <small>Short-term use as prescribed</small>	 Anti-inflammatory Medications <small>May not be used after some spine surgeries</small>	 Acetaminophen <small>Used alone or with other treatment options</small>	 Other Treatment Options <small>Ice, braces, nerve blocks (if needed)</small>
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Take medications exactly as prescribed. Follow your doctor's instructions.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR

- Severe or worsening pain or pain that does not improve with medications
- Fever (new or increasing temperature)
- Redness, drainage, or pus at the incision site
- New numbness, weakness, or trouble walking
- Chest pain or trouble breathing

When in doubt, reach out to your care team. We are here to help.

KEY RECOVERY TIPS

- Take your medications exactly as directed.
- Walk and move as instructed.
- Follow bending, lifting, and twisting limits.
- Attend all follow-up visits.

Your recovery is a team effort. Your role matters!

 FOLLOW YOUR DOCTOR'S PLAN.
 TAKE IT ONE DAY AT A TIME.
 BETTER DAYS ARE AHEAD.
 Be patient
 Stay active
 Rest well
 You've got this!

What This Means for You

Healing after lower back surgery takes time. Pain often changes as the body heals. Some pain, swelling, stiffness, and soreness are normal during recovery. Most patients experience the worst pain during the first few days postoperatively. Thereafter, pain usually improves slowly over the next few weeks.

Normal Recovery: What to Expect

Your recovery may happen in stages.

- Postoperative days 1 through 3: Pain and swelling usually are the worst.
- Postoperative weeks 1 and 2: Pain often begins to improve; however, soreness and stiffness may persist.
- Postoperative weeks 3 and beyond: Healing continues; many patients slowly feel stronger.

Recovery is not a straight line. Some days will feel better than other days. Ups and downs are normal throughout recovery.

How Pain is Controlled

Your care team may use multiple approaches to manage your pain. This is called multimodal pain control. Your pain management plan may include the following:

- Pain medications
- Anti-inflammatory medications (if safe)
- Acetaminophen
- Ice, braces, or nerve blocks (if necessary)

Always take your medications exactly as prescribed. Do not change your pain management plan unless instructed by your doctor.

Common Symptoms

The following symptoms often are part of the normal healing process after lower back surgery:

- Soreness and aching from healing tissues and muscles
- Stiffness, especially in the morning or after sitting
- Pain with activity that improves with rest
- Swelling around the incision or surgical area

When to Call Your Doctor

Call your doctor if you experience any of the following:

- Severe or worsening pain
- Pain that does not improve with medications
- Fever or increasing temperature
- Redness, drainage, or pus at the incision site
- New numbness, weakness, or unsteadiness in the legs
- Chest pain or trouble breathing

Key Recovery Tips

- Take your medications exactly as directed.
- Walk and move as instructed.
- Follow bending, lifting, and twisting precautions.
- Attend all scheduled follow-up visits.

Your recovery takes time. Be patient, follow your pain management plan, and contact to your care team if something does not feel right.

Educational Content Disclosure

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