

Thoracic and Lumbar Decompression/Discectomy Activity Guide

4 weeks – 3 months after surgery

Spine precautions:

- Limit bending or twisting at the waist
- Limit hip flexion more than 90 degrees or crossing the legs
- No lifting more than 15lbs

Activities and exercises:

- Continue walking, may now use a treadmill at a comfortable walking pace
 - If already doing a walking regimen, increase gradually with a goal of 50-100% more at 3 months
 - If not doing a walking regimen, begin one with a 10-15-minute walk and increase to 30 minutes by 3 months
- Water walking if incision is healed and approved by our office (no swimming for exercise yet)
- Recumbent stationary bike
- Stair stepper / stair mill
- Light arm strengthening
 - Biceps, triceps (lying in bed), wrist flexion/extension, deltoids
 - No overhead lifting, no benches/chest presses, no arching/twisting back
 - Lifting limit of 15lbs still applies

Tips and advice:

- All of the above activities must be done with the spine precautions in mind
- Add new activities gradually, no more than 1 per week
 - If it hurts, stop this activity and wait a few weeks before trying it again
 - Shorter, more frequent periods of activity and exercise are better tolerated than one long period

Please send a MyChart message or call with any questions: 410-539-3434

Thoracic and Lumbar Decompression/Discectomy Activity Guide

3 – 6 months after surgery

Spine precautions:

- Gradually begin bending and twisting at the waist
- Gradually allow hip flexion more than 90 degrees and crossing the legs
- No lifting more than 20lbs

Activities and exercises:

- All previously recommended exercises
- Upright stationary bicycle
- Elliptical
- Light/modified water aerobics
- Swimming with kickboard (no spinal rotation or arching), snorkeling
- Treadmill at brisk walk/light jogging pace, incline okay
- Easy hiking (no heavy backpacks)
- Upper & lower extremity strength training with resistance bands (maintain precautions) or 20lb weights
- Light/easy fishing
- Hunting (firearms with minimal kick and crossbows)
- Free throws, light tennis, kicking soccer ball, playing catch (must maintain precautions)
- Cross country skiing

Tips and advice:

- All of the above activities must be done with the spine precautions in mind
- Add new activities gradually, no more than 1 per week
 - If it hurts, stop this activity and wait a few weeks before trying it again
 - Shorter, more frequent periods of activity and exercise are better tolerated than one long period
 - Goal will be to return to normal activity between 6-9 months

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Thoracic and Lumbar Decompression/Discectomy Activity Guide

6 – 12 months after surgery

Spine precautions:

- Increase bending and twisting back to normal activity between 6-9 months
- Increase lifting to normal household lifting (around 50lbs) between 6-9 months
- Continue to be nice to your back!** Use good body mechanics, carry objects close to the body, use legs for lifting, etc.

Activities and exercises:

- All previously recommended exercises
- No set activity restrictions but increase gradually!
- Weight machines/free weights for upper & lower extremities, use caution with heavy weights/overhead lifting
- Hiking
- Cycling
- Skiing
- Swimming
- Golf
- Running
- Contact sports
- Modified yoga/Pilates

Tips and advice:

- Add new activities gradually, no more than 1 per week
- If it hurts, stop this activity and wait a few weeks before trying it again
- Gradually increase activity to at least 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise 5-6 days/week and strength training 2-3 days/week

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