

Name of occupational therapist:

Contact number:

Local services contact numbers / details of referrals made:

Service	Contact	Reason for referral

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After neck or back surgery Advice from your occupational therapist

Occupational therapists can offer assessment, treatment and advice if you are having difficulty returning to everyday activities at home, work or in leisure pursuits. You may need further advice about specific everyday activities, or about equipment and services which can help you at home. Please ask to speak to your occupational therapist if you have further questions after you have read this booklet. You should direct specific questions about your operation and when you are safe to return to 'active' sports, driving or work following surgery to your consultant or general practitioner (GP).

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF GOOD NECK AND BACK CARE

- Good back care principles should be carried out in all areas of daily living for the rest of your life.
- Following surgery you should return to activities gradually and remember that pain indicates when you are doing too much.
- Work out your tolerance level and only increase your activity level gradually.
- Seek specific advice from your surgical team about when you can return to more active tasks, eg. sport, driving, work.
- You may also need further advice about specific everyday activities, or about equipment and services which can help you at home.

- Plan ahead and pace yourself by spreading your activities over the day / week and alternating heavier tasks with lighter ones as well as taking regular rests.
- Avoid staying in one position for a long period of time - consider alternative positions for activities, eg. sitting to iron.
- Avoid heavy activities, especially in the early stages of recovery. Get someone else to help if possible.
- Organise your environment. Place objects that you use often within easy reach. Avoid movements that place unnecessary stress on your back, such as over-reaching or lifting heavy objects.
- Use energy-saving equipment, eg. long-handled equipment to avoid bending and reaching.

ACTIVITIES OF DAILY LIVING

Ask to speak to your occupational therapist if you need further advice about returning to daily living activity.

Personal care

If bathing, make sure you have a non-slip mat in the bath and take care when getting in and out of the bath.

- It is better to kneel or stand in the bath rather than sitting with straight legs.
- A bath board may help if you cannot stand in the bath, or if you have an over-bath shower. Ask your occupational therapist to show you one.

- If carrying a child, place their back to you, so the heaviest part of the load is closest to your body.
- When lifting from a cot, make sure the cot side is down and you bring the child as close to you as possible.
- When lifting from a pram / pushchair, squat or kneel if possible to adjust straps, etc. Then bring the child out towards your knee before standing upright. Use a support for yourself for balance.
- Kneel whilst bathing your child.
- Get someone else to help if possible.

Sport and leisure

- Make sure you have specific advice from your consultant or GP before returning to active sport.
- Apply back and neck care principles in all sport and leisure pursuits.
- Gradually increase activity levels within your own limits.

Relaxation

- Try to incorporate rest and relaxation into your daily routine. Choose a method most suited to you from the many books and tapes that are available. Your therapist may be able to advise you about this.

If you have difficulties with any of these areas of daily living, your occupational therapist will come to see you on the ward to discuss them. Please ask to speak to them if you want further advice.

Heavy work (eg gardening)

- Ask for advice about when you can begin these tasks.
- Get help from someone else if possible.
- Use long-handled equipment to avoid bending.
- Take the strain through your arms and legs rather than your neck and back.
- Apply the principles of safe lifting and carrying at all times when carrying out ALL manual work.

Driving

- Ask for advice from your consultant / GP about when it is safe to return to driving.
- It is the responsibility of the driver to ensure that he/she is in control of the vehicle at all times.
- Whether driver or passenger, adjust your car seat as far as possible to give your back and thighs support.
- A cushion or lumbar roll may provide extra support for your lower back if your car seat does not.
- Avoid long continuous drives, or take regular breaks.
- Try to ensure that the car seat headrest is adjusted to give you adequate support.

Childcare

- Repetitive lifting may cause or aggravate pain. Try to kneel or squat to the child's level.

Dressing

If you have difficulty reaching your feet you could try:

- Placing your foot on a stool in front of you, remembering to bend at the hip and knee of the supporting leg and to maintain the back's natural curves.

or

- Bring your foot up to you, bending at the hip and knees and maintaining the back's natural curves.

or

- Lie on a flat surface and bring your knees up to you, one at a time.

If you have had surgery on your neck, take care not to over-flex (bend forward) or extend your neck when putting garments over your head (both putting clothes on and taking them off). Button-up garments may be easier to manage initially.

Grooming

If you spend additional time on teeth, hair or make-up, you may consider changing your posture whilst carrying them out. Consider sitting on a high chair at the basin and re-position mirrors to avoid leaning forwards.

Domestic activities (eg. laundry, cleaning, vacuuming, ironing, bed-making, shopping)

- Take care when carrying these out following surgery.
- Avoid carrying heavy loads.
- If carrying, hold the object close to you at waist height and break it down into small loads if possible.

- Re-organise your environment to avoid over-reaching and bending.
- Work at appropriate height work surfaces. Place regularly-used items within easy reach, ie. around waist height.
- If using tools with long handles, eg. a mop, hold it at hip height and walk with it rather than leaning forward or twisting.
- Get castors fitted to heavy furniture, which allows them to be moved easily for cleaning.
- Do your household jobs little and often rather than tackling all domestic activity at once.
- Shopping – get food delivered if possible. Use a trolley to shop rather than a basket. Shop often, for smaller amounts if possible.
- Bed-making – kneel to make the bed rather than bending. Use a duvet rather than reaching to tuck in blankets.

Sex

- You can resume sexual activity when you feel comfortable.
- Pelvic activity can help to maintain lower back strength and flexibility however it may be advisable to take a more passive role in the early stages.
- Try alternative positions – use pillows to support your back.

Work

- Discuss with your consultant / GP about the best time to return to work.

- Depending on your employment and recovery, a graded return to work programme may be advised.

- Balance periods of standing/sitting according to your own tolerance levels.

- Take regular rest periods.

- Check your environment to ensure you are not placing unnecessary stress on your neck.

Desk / office work

- Organise your desk to ensure items used regularly are within reach.

- Ensure adequate chair positioning. A chair on wheels helps avoid twisting, but make sure the chair is behind your knees and stable before sitting.

- Ensure table / computer workstation is positioned correctly, ie. at elbow height, to avoid hunching shoulders, tiring arms and causing neck stiffness.

- If standing to work, ensure the work height is approximately 5cm below elbow height. Use a high stool if you can to alternate position. A block to place your foot on can alternate the weight through your legs but keep your hips in alignment.

- Filing – sit down to reach lower drawers and push / close them with your feet. Organise filing so that documents used regularly are in a drawer at waist height. When opening / closing drawers, stand as close as possible.

- Telephone – hold the receiver rather than placing it on your shoulder. Consider a hands-free set or speakerphone if you use the phone a lot.