

VCU Health — Department of Neurosurgery

Postoperative Restrictions Fusion

Attending: James H. Mooney, MD

Nurse Assistants: Marsha Hallinan, R.N., B.S.N.; JoAnn Tillett, R.N.

Activity	Earliest Time to Resume (Weeks Postop)	Notes/Conditions
Showering	POD 2–3 (≈0.5 wk)	Let water run over incision; no scrubbing/soaking.
Walking	Immediate (0 wk)	Encouraged daily, as tolerated.
Riding in a car	Immediate (0 wk)	Take breaks every 30–45 min.
Going to restaurant/store	1–2 wks	As tolerated, with activity pacing.
School / desk work	2–3 wks	Light duty; longer if heavy labor.
Driving	2 wks	Must be off narcotics and able to turn head/torso safely.
Stationary bike / light arm exercise	3–4 wks	Only after incision healed.
Flying	4 wks	Only after incision fully healed.
Outpatient physical therapy	4–6 wks	Begin if prescribed, once wound healed.
Swimming / hot tub	6 wks	Incision must be fully healed and scab-free.
Light jogging	8–10 wks	On even surfaces; start gradually.
Shooting free throws / light tennis / volleyball	8–10 wks	Non-contact, gradual progression.
Sex (passive partner)	6 wks	After wound healed; avoid excessive strain.
Sex (active partner)	8 wks	Must be off narcotics and comfortable with movement.
Lawn mowing (riding)	8–10 wks	Only when off narcotics and comfortable turning head.
Lawn mowing (pushing)	12+ wks	Dependent on weight restrictions and core strength.
Bending forward (controlled)	12+ wks	Avoid repetitive or loaded flexion early on.
Contact sports, heavy labor	≥12–24 wks (surgeon-specific)	Case-by-case basis; longer for fusion patients.

Call the Clinic or Seek Care if You Experience:

- New or worsening weakness, numbness, or bowel/bladder changes.
- Fever > 101.5°F, redness, swelling, or drainage from the incision.
- Uncontrolled pain, chest pain, or shortness of breath.

This handout provides typical guidance. Your surgeon may adjust recommendations based on your specific procedure and recovery.

Weight Restrictions

Time from Surgery	Restriction
First 2 weeks	5–10 lbs limit.
Weeks 2–6	Continue 5–10 lbs limit. Avoid pushing/pulling/twisting.
After 6 weeks (instrumented spine surgery)	Increase by 5 lbs every other week as tolerated until 40 lbs.
After 2 years	No weight restrictions (unless otherwise instructed by your surgeon).

**VCU Neurosurgery Postoperative Activity Timeline
(Attending: James H. Mooney, MD)**

