

# Cervical Spine Injury and Neck Collar

You have injured the part of your spine that is in your neck — the cervical spine.

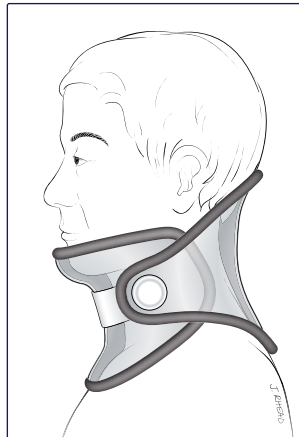
**To protect your spine while it heals, you will need to wear a neck collar, or cervical collar.**

You'll also need to limit certain activities for several months.

## Wearing your collar

**You must wear the cervical collar at all times,** even while you shower or sleep. Not wearing the collar could cause more pain, further injury, or even permanent disability.

You will need to wear the collar while showering so plan ahead so you'll have time for the collar to dry.



Only remove the collar to change the pads. Follow the steps you were shown in the hospital. With help from someone else, take the collar off, change the pads, and and put it back on while you are lying in bed. **Do not move your neck while the collar is off.**

## If you had surgery

Change your bandages at least daily, or more often if they become soiled. If your incision was sealed with **sterile strips**, you may shower with them. In time they will fall off on their own. If the strips have not fallen off in 10 to 14 days you may gently remove them.

## Activity do's and don'ts

**For 3 to 6 months, DO NOT:**

- Lift more than 10 pounds. In other words, don't lift anything heavier than a gallon of milk.
- Drive with your neck collar on.
- Do any activity that involves pushing, pulling, or twisting, such as vacuuming, mowing, or shoveling.
- Do any activity that could cause injury, such as contact sports or high-impact exercise. Avoid basketball, wrestling, and any sport that requires a helmet. Avoid hiking, biking, running, horseback riding, or ATV riding.

**DO:**

- Walk or do other low-impact exercises, and resume normal daily activities. (You may resume sexual activity when your doctor says it's okay.) Be careful not to overdo.
- Keep your follow-up appointment with your primary care provider or the Trauma Service.
- Return to work when your doctor says it's okay.

## When should I call my doctor?

**Call your doctor, the Trauma Service, or go to the nearest emergency department right away if:**

- You notice signs of infection at the surgical site (incision), such as red or swollen tissue, fluid drainage, or a fever of 101.5 °F (38.6 °C) or higher.
- Your incision opens.
- Your arms or fingers feel cold to the touch or your skin turns bluish or pale.
- You feel numbness, tingling or burning.
- Your pain is uncontrolled, even when taking your medicines as prescribed. Your doctor can decide if you need a different medicine or if your prescription needs to be adjusted. Uncontrolled pain may also be a sign of another problem.

## Managing your pain

Pain medicine will not relieve 100% of your pain, but it will make the pain more tolerable. Your need for pain medicine should decrease over time, until eventually you don't need it. Ice can also be helpful for pain and swelling.

### The Trauma Service and pain medicine

The Trauma Service team can address only short-term pain and does not manage chronic (long-term) pain. Please see the policies below:

- When you leave the hospital, you will be prescribed enough pain medicine to last until your follow-up visit, if taken as directed. During the follow-up visit, you may be given one refill prescription, if needed.
- The Trauma Service does NOT refill pain medicines over the phone.
- The Trauma Service will NOT replace a prescription that is lost or stolen, or refill a prescription if you run out of medicine early.

If your pain continues beyond 3 or 4 weeks, you will need to see your primary care provider about managing pain.

### Safety with opioid medicine

Opioids are strong medicines that change the way the brain processes pain. Examples include hydrocodone or oxycodone. Opioids can be dangerous if you don't use them correctly. To increase your safety, visit [knowyourscript.org](https://www.knowyourscript.org) and follow these general rules:

- **Do not drink alcohol or use recreational drugs** while taking opioid pain pills. This is especially important if you have injured your liver.
- **Do not take sleep aids, anti-anxiety medicine, or other pain relievers** without your doctor's permission.

- **Do not drive a car, operate dangerous machinery, or care for others while taking the medicine.** Opioid pain pills may harm your judgment.
- **Never share your pain medicine.** Don't give a pill to a friend or family member, even if the person is in pain. Sharing pain medicines is dangerous and illegal.
- **Lock up your pain medicine** so that others cannot get to or steal it.
- **Take the medicine only as long as you need it.** When the pain gets better, stop taking the medicine. To avoid side effects from stopping suddenly, you may want to reduce the dose a little at a time for a few days.
- **Watch for side effects.**
  - The most common side effect is constipation. Drink extra water and take a laxative or stool softener if needed.
  - The most serious side effect is decreased breathing, especially while you sleep. This can be deadly. If family or friends notice this problem, they should get medical help right away.
- When you have finished taking the medicine, **get rid of leftover pills by properly disposing of them or dropping them off at a drug collection site.** For instructions on safe disposal of your medicines, see [knowyourscript.org](https://www.knowyourscript.org).

### Safety with over-the-counter pain pills

- **Do not take more than the maximum daily limit of over-the-counter pain pills.** Check the bottle for the number of pills you can safely take each day.
- **Do not take too much acetaminophen (Tylenol).** Do not take more than 3,000 mg total every 24 hours. Some prescribed pain pills already contain acetaminophen. Ask your pharmacist if this is the case for you.

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