

Preparing for Cervical Disc Replacement Surgery

Your Pre-Operative Planning Guide

6-8 Weeks Before Surgery

Medical Optimisation:

- **Complete smoking cessation** - This is absolutely critical for healing and reducing complications
- **Medical assessment** - Evaluation of general health and fitness for general anaesthesia
- **Medication review** - Discuss all medications with your surgeon and anaesthetist
- **Dental clearance** - Address any dental infections or required procedures before spinal surgery

Conservative Treatment Completion:

Ensure you have adequately trialled all non-surgical options as required:

- Rest and activity modification
- Anti-inflammatory medications and appropriate pain management
- Physical therapy and gentle neck exercises
- Spinal nerve root injections with local anaesthetic or steroids if appropriate

Educational Preparation:

- Take sufficient time to consider all available treatment options
- Read all provided educational materials thoroughly
- Attend pre-operative education sessions if available
- Prepare list of questions for your surgical consultation

2-3 Weeks Before Surgery

Home and Work Preparation:

- Arrange time off work (typically a few weeks for most occupations)
- Organise assistance with household tasks, shopping, and transportation
- Prepare comfortable recovery area at appropriate height
- Stock up on easy-to-prepare, nutritious meals

Medical Preparations:

- Complete any required pre-operative tests (blood work, ECG, chest X-ray)
- Obtain any required medical clearances from other specialists
- Confirm medication adjustments with your surgeon
- Schedule follow-up appointments as recommended

Insurance and Financial:

- Confirm Medicare eligibility and any private insurance coverage
- Understand out-of-pocket expenses and payment schedules

- Arrange medical leave documentation if required
- Complete any required insurance pre-approvals

1 Week Before Surgery

Medication Management:

- **Stop blood thinners** as directed (typically 5-7 days before surgery)
- **Avoid herbal supplements** that may affect bleeding or healing
- **Continue essential medications** unless specifically instructed otherwise
- **Discuss pain medication plan** with your healthcare team

Physical Preparation:

- Continue gentle neck exercises but avoid aggressive manipulation
- Maintain good nutrition and hydration
- Get adequate rest and sleep
- Avoid alcohol consumption

Logistical Arrangements:

- Confirm surgery time and hospital arrival
- Arrange transportation to and from hospital
- Prepare overnight bag with comfortable clothing
- Complete hospital registration and paperwork

Final Medical Tasks:

- Attend pre-admission clinic if required
- Complete final blood tests if ordered
- Confirm fasting instructions (typically nothing after midnight)
- Take prescribed medications with small sip of water if instructed

Day of Surgery

Morning Preparation:

- Shower with regular soap as instructed
- Do not eat or drink anything after midnight (unless specifically instructed)
- Take prescribed medications with minimal water if directed
- Wear comfortable, loose-fitting clothes that button in front
- Leave all jewellery, makeup, and nail polish at home

What to Bring:

- Government-issued photo ID
- Medicare card and private insurance documentation
- Complete list of current medications
- Comfortable slip-on shoes
- Minimal personal items for comfort

At the Hospital:

- Arrive at scheduled time
- Complete final registration and consent processes
- Meet with anaesthesia team for final assessment
- Sequential compression stockings will be fitted to maintain blood circulation

Pre-Operative Testing Requirements**Blood Tests (Usually 1-2 weeks before):**

- Full blood count to check for anaemia or infection
- Comprehensive metabolic panel for kidney and liver function
- Coagulation studies to assess bleeding risk
- Type and screen in case blood transfusion needed

Cardiac Assessment:

- ECG (electrocardiogram) for patients over certain age or with heart conditions
- Additional cardiac testing if significant heart disease present
- Cardiology clearance for high-risk patients

Additional Tests (If Indicated):

- Chest X-ray for patients with lung disease or smoking history
- Pulmonary function tests if chronic lung disease present
- Additional imaging if anatomy requires clarification

Medication Management Guidelines**Medications to STOP Before Surgery:**

- **Anticoagulants** (warfarin, newer blood thinners): Stop as directed by surgeon
- **Anti-platelet agents** (clopidogrel): Usually stopped 7 days before
- **Herbal supplements**: Stop 1-2 weeks before surgery
- **Vitamin E supplements**: Stop 1-2 weeks before surgery

Medications to CONTINUE:

- Blood pressure medications (usually taken morning of surgery with small sip of water)
- Heart medications unless specifically instructed otherwise
- Thyroid medications
- Seizure medications
- Most psychiatric medications

Always confirm medication instructions with your surgeon - never make changes without approval.

Nutritional Preparation

Protein Requirements (Essential for healing):

- Aim for adequate protein intake to support tissue repair
- Include lean meats, fish, eggs, dairy products, legumes
- Consider protein supplements if dietary intake inadequate

Supportive Nutrients:

- **Vitamin C:** Important for collagen synthesis and wound healing
- **Vitamin D:** Essential for bone health and healing
- **Adequate hydration:** Maintain good fluid intake

Anti-inflammatory Foods:

- Include omega-3 fatty acids (fish, flaxseed, walnuts)
- Colourful fruits and vegetables for antioxidants
- Avoid excessive processed foods and sugar

Physical Preparation

Pre-operative Exercise:

- Continue gentle range of motion exercises as tolerated
- Maintain general fitness within limitations of your condition
- Avoid aggressive neck manipulation or new exercise programs

Postural Awareness:

- Practice good ergonomics at work and home
- Use supportive pillows for sleeping
- Take frequent breaks from prolonged positions

Home Environment Preparation

Recovery Area Setup:

- Ensure bed height allows easy getting in/out without neck strain
- Arrange multiple pillows for comfortable positioning
- Place frequently used items within easy reach
- Consider temporary setup on main floor if stairs problematic

Safety Modifications:

- Remove or secure loose rugs
- Ensure adequate lighting throughout home
- Clear pathways of clutter
- Have phone easily accessible for emergencies

Support System Planning:

- Arrange for someone to drive you home and stay first night

- Organise help with meal preparation and household tasks
- Plan for assistance with transportation to appointments
- Set up communication plan for family updates

Emergency Planning and Expectations

Normal Post-operative Symptoms:

- Mild to moderate neck discomfort
- Temporary voice hoarseness (very common and usually temporary)
- Mild swallowing difficulty for first few days
- Some fatigue and need for extra rest

Concerning Symptoms Requiring Medical Attention:

- Severe or worsening neck pain different from expected discomfort
- New or increased arm weakness or numbness
- Difficulty breathing or swallowing that doesn't improve
- Signs of infection (fever, wound drainage, increasing redness)

Recovery Expectations:

- Hospital stay: Usually 1-2 nights
- Return to light activities: Within days to weeks
- Return to work: Typically a few weeks depending on occupation
- Full recovery: Several months for complete healing

Final Pre-Operative Checklist

Week Before Surgery:

- Complete all pre-operative testing
- Attend pre-admission appointment if required
- Confirm surgery time and location
- Arrange transportation and support
- Stop medications as directed
- Complete work and insurance arrangements

Day Before Surgery:

- Follow any specific pre-operative instructions
- Confirm fasting requirements
- Set up recovery area at home
- Pack hospital bag
- Get good night's sleep
- Take prescribed medications as directed

Day of Surgery:

- Arrive on time with required documents
- Comfortable clothing and appropriate footwear
- Have emergency contacts available
- Trust your surgical team and stay positive

Special Considerations

For Patients with Multiple Medical Conditions:

- May require additional specialist consultations
- More complex medication management during perioperative period
- Extended preparation time may be needed
- Additional monitoring during recovery

For Working Professionals:

- Plan for adequate time away from work responsibilities
- Consider modified duties upon return if physically demanding job
- Arrange coverage for essential work functions
- Plan communication with employer about expected recovery timeline

Questions to Ask Your Surgical Team

About the Procedure:

- What type of artificial disc will be used and why?
- How long is the expected surgery time?
- What are the specific risks for my case?

About Recovery:

- What can I expect in terms of pain and recovery timeline?
- When can I return to specific activities important to me?
- What warning signs should I watch for?

About Follow-up:

- When will my first post-operative appointment be?
- What ongoing monitoring will be needed?
- Who do I contact if I have concerns during recovery?

Remember: Thorough preparation leads to better outcomes and smoother recovery. The cervical disc replacement procedure has excellent success rates with satisfaction rates of 80-90% in appropriately selected patients. Dr Aliashkevich's extensive experience with hundreds of patients since 2006 demonstrates that cervical arthroplasty offers superior outcomes compared to fusion surgery, with the added benefit of motion preservation.

This guide provides general preparation information. Always follow your surgeon's specific instructions, which may be modified based on your individual medical condition and circumstances.