POST-OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR
POSTERIOR LUMBAR FUSION

The surgical procedure you have undergone is called “Lumbar Fusion.” Your role now is to become an active participant in your recovery. The following instructions are intended to assist you in beginning your recovery.

**You must avoid smoking or being around others who smoke. Avoid all products that contain Nicotine. Do not take Ibuprofen or anti-inflammatory medications, as these may alter healing of the fusion.**

**ACTIVITIES**—The first week after surgery, you should be up and walking about the house. This is a time of healing, so remember not to overdo any activity. Activities around the house, such as washing dishes, fixing light meals, and your own personal care are fine. Avoid strenuous activities, such as vacuuming, lifting laundry or grocery bags. Do not lift anything heavier than 1 gallon of milk (or about 5-8 pounds) and limit bending. If you need to pick up something from the floor, use your knees or ask for assistance. After the first week, you may gradually increase your activities, but still avoid heavy lifting, pushing/pulling and bending. Bend your knees to pick up objects from the floor. Walking is the best way to rebuild strength and stamina. Start **SLOWLY** and gradually increase the distance a little every week. Walk at a pace that avoids fatigue or severe pain. Do not try to walk several blocks the first day! As you increase the distance, you may feel tired. You should be able to walk several blocks by your first clinic visit. Sexual activity may be resumed in 4 weeks.

**BATHING/INCISION CARE**—The incision may be tender to touch or feel numb—this is normal. Keep the incision clean and dry. Be sure to dry the area thoroughly after your shower or bath. The incision will be closed with steri-strips (small strips of tape) staples or sutures. The steri-strips should fall off in about 7-10 days. If they have not come off in 10 days, you can soften them with a warm moist cloth and gently pull them off. If you have staples or stitches, you will need to come back to clinic in 10-14 days for removal. Do not apply any lotions, ointments or oils on the incision. If you notice any swelling, redness, drainage or heat around the incision, notify the office immediately.

**DRIVING**—**DO NOT** drive while taking narcotic medications. You should not drive for about 3-4 weeks after surgery. You can be a passenger in the vehicle for short distances.
but if you travel any long distance, please stop about every 30 minutes and walk/stretch.

**RETURN TO WORK** - The decision to return to work will be determined on an individual basis. Many people who have a strenuous job (construction, heavy labor, etc) may need to be off work up to 12 weeks. If you need a work release, please let us know as soon as possible, and not the same day you are planning to return to work.

**NUTRITION** - Good nutrition is an essential part of healing. You should eat a balanced diet each day, including fruits, vegetables, dairy products and protein. Remember to drink plenty of water. You should supplement your diet with Calcium and Vitamin D to help the fusion. If you have not had a bowel movement 3 days after surgery, you will need to use a laxative of your choice, such as Dulcolax, Milk of Magnesia, or Ex-Lax.

**MEDICATIONS** - You may resume the medications you were taking before surgery, with the general exception of the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications such as Motrin, Aleve, Advil, Naprosyn, Ibuprofen or aspirin. These medications can slow or alter healing of the fusion. You will receive a prescription for pain medication at discharge from the hospital. The pain medication works best if taken before the pain becomes severe. To reduce stomach upset, always take the medication with food. Begin to wean yourself off the pain medication during the second week after discharge. If you need a refill, please call the office during working hours at least 2 days before your prescription runs out. Do not wait until your bottle is empty to call for a refill. **DO NOT** drive while taking narcotic medications.

**CALL THE OFFICE:**
- If you have severe pain unrelieved by the medications, new numbness or tingling in your legs or feet;
- If you have a fever 100.4 or greater.
- If you notice swelling, redness, heat or drainage from the incision or IV site.

The Missouri Spine Center number is 573-884-BACK (2225) – Press Option 0 then Option 2 - from 8:00am to 5:00pm Monday through Friday. After 5:00 pm, on weekends, or holidays, please call the University Hospital operator at 573-882-4141 and ask for the Orthopaedic resident on call.

It has been our pleasure to assist you in your recovery.