POSTERIOR THORACIC-LUMBAR FUSION (SPINAL DEFORMITY) POST-OPERATIVE REHABILITATION PROTOCOL

- No NSAIDs for 6 months
- No driving while on narcotics
- No scar mobilization for 3 months
- Smoking cessation education
- No jogging/running/horseback riding for 6 months
- All patients progress at different rates

Phase 1 (POD 1 - 6 weeks)

- Brace, if needed, patient specific
  - Typically needed for those with poor bone quality, smokers, sustained spinal fractures
Focus:
- Mobilization, correctly performing ADLs
  - Don/doff shoes, appropriate sitting posture, appropriate body mechanics when picking items off ground, etc
- Ambulation, endurance, posture
  - Begin progressive walking program (goal 30 minutes per day)
- Correct usage of assistive device for ambulation
- Diaphragmatic breathing, deep pursed lip breathing exercises

Phase 2 (6 weeks - 3 months)

- Begin regimented OP PT (2-3x/week) for 6-8 weeks (12-24 visits)
- Administer ODI, FABQ at initial evaluation
  - FABQ at 6th visit
Goals:
- Maintain erect posture throughout the day
- Reestablish neuromuscular control of the lumbar stabilizers
- Volitional contraction of TA and lumbar multifidi for 5 sets x 5 sec
- Improve LE strength & functional mobility
- Demonstrate appropriate functional movement within precautions
- Continue progressive walking program
- Independent with home exercise program
- Progress exercises once patient demonstrates proper form/technique and control of neutral spine with each repetition (<20 lbs x 3 mos lifting precautions)
- D/C brace at 12 weeks or surgeon’s orders
Focus:
- Initiate aerobic conditioning (gentle, progressive)
  - Ambulation, endurance
    - Progress toward discontinuing assisted devices
    - Treadmill, track, recumbent bike
- Continue to walk within tolerance with progressive walking program

- Strengthening (legs core back)
  - Can use light weights, pulley system, resistance bands
  - Isometric lumbar stabilization exercises with trunk ext/flex/lateral flexion
    - 15s → 45s x 3
  - Lumbar stabilization exercises (with trunk co-contraction) – 2 sets x 10-20 repetitions
    - 1. Hooklying pelvic neutral (hip at 45°): marches → SL heel slide → leg lift with knee ext.
    - 2. Dead bug: alt. UE → alt. LE → alt. opposite UE/LE
    - 3. Bridges
    - 4. Birddog: alt. UE → alt. LE → alt. opposite UE/LE
    - 5. Pelvic tilts
  - LE strengthening exercises (maintain neutral spine) – 2 sets x 10-20 repetitions (progress with resistance):
    - 1. Wall squats
    - 2. Hooklying bent knee fall outs
    - 3. Sidelying hip abduction/clamshells
    - 4. Standing steam boats

- Stretching, LE flexibility
  - Bilateral LE stretching 3 sets of 30s (gastoc/soleus, hamstrings, hip flexor)
  - Nerve glides 2 sets of 10-20 repetitions

- Balance, Posture, Gait training
  - Neuromuscular activation of lumbar stabilizers (multifidi, TA)
    - Diaphragmatic breathing
    - Abdominal isometrics, hollowing of TA and lumbar multifidi
    - Drawing in maneuver and VC for volitional lumbar multifidi contraction
    - Maintain neutral spine, initiate pelvic tilts in all directions
    - Appropriate lumbar lordosis
  - +/- pool therapy
  - Swimming within tolerance

- Functional movement for home/work
  - Proper body mechanics
    - Bend with knees when reaching toward floor
    - Lift slowly, close to body
    - Bring feet/leg up to self when donning/doffing shoes, socks

- Education/review on precautions, anatomy/biomechanics, surgical procedure, prognosis
- Control pain/inflammation
  - Ice/modalities
  - Manual
    - Grade I-II joint mobilizations above/below surgical site for pain modulation
    - Soft tissue mobilization for hypertonic paraspinal muscles
- Facilitate healing of incision (watch for increased redness/drainage/swelling)

**Suggested Components for Daily HEP:**
- Pain management PRN
- Appropriate stretches
- LE strengthening with neutral spine
- Postural awareness, pelvic tilts
- Abdominal hollowing in isolation and with extremity movement

**Avoid:**
- Lifting, bending, twisting > 20 lbs until 3 months post-op (BLTs)
  - Includes yardwork, pushing/pulling with vacuum, etc.
- Sitting prolonged periods - encourage position changes 30-45 minutes
  - Sit with back support, feet flat on floor, knees level with hips
- Lotions/creams, submerging incision underwater until fully healed

Other considerations/precautions:
- Brace wear as indicated by surgeon
- Consult doctor for return to driving, return to work
  - May be shorter return for sedentary jobs
- Sleeping
  - Supine with pillow under knees
  - Side-lying with pillow between knees

Phase 3 (3 - 6+ months)

- ODI + FABQ at discharge

Goals:
- Progress to return to baseline standing/walking duration, distance
- Maintenance of trunk co-contraction throughout therapeutic activities
- Volitional contraction of TA and lumbar multifidi isometrics 5 sets x 10 sec
- Maintenance of neutral spine during therapy interventions
- Improve trunk and LE strength
- Achieve functional ROM
- Demonstrate proper ergonomics and work simulation
  - Able to tolerate work simulation activities without increase in symptoms
- Continue, ultimately complete progressive walking program
- Independent with HEP
- Achieve ODI MCID

Focus:
- Progress endurance
  - Aerobic conditioning
    - walking/treadmill
    - Progress to elliptical
- Trunk + LE mobility, flexibility
  - Aim for mid-end range ROM by 3-4 months
    - Quadruped rocking, cat/camel, prayer stretch
  - Bilateral LE stretching
- Strengthening
  - Increase weight limit by 5 lbs every other week as tolerable
  - Muscle Strength of lumbar stabilizers
    - Dynamic exercises
      - with trunk co-contraction – 2-3 sets x 10,15,20 repetitions:
        - 1. Hook-lying pelvic neutral (hip at 90°): marches → SL heel slide → leg lift c knee ext, bent knee fall outs
        - 2. Sitting or standing pelvic neutral: alt. UE → marching → marching c alt. UE, steam boats
        - 3. SL bridges or DL c marches
- 4. Prone and side-lying planks (on knees: 5-10 sec)
- 5. Standing isometric core resistance c Theraband
- 6. Standing pelvic neutral: shoulder ext, hor. abd., row, D1/D2 c Therband (bil → uni)
- Further progressions - 2-4 sets of 10, 15, 20 repetitions
  - Bridges on Dynadisc or BOSU
  - Upward/downward chops (cable column)
  - Prone and side-lying planks (off knees: 5-10 sec)
  - Walkouts/rollouts on stability ball
  - Cable column resistance walking (close to body → away from body or OH)
  - Prone superman’s
- LE strengthening exercises (maintain neutral spine) – 2-3 sets x 10,15,20 repetitions (progress c resistance)
  - Stability ball wall squats
  - Standing hip abduction and extension
  - Side stepping
  - Lunges
  - SL deadlifts
- Further progression (2-4x)
  - Squats (DL → SL)
  - SL deadlift on Dynadisc or BOSU
  - Lateral band walks
  - Lunges
- Core strengthening (full planks)
- Facilitate neuromuscular re-education
  - Abdominal hollowing of TA, lumbar multifidi
- Balance, progressing as needed
  - DL → SL, EO → EC, no UE mvmt → UE mvmt, stable → unstable surface
  - High level
    - Rebounder toss, medicine ball rotations on stability ball, etc
- Pain/inflammation reduction
  - Joint mobilization (grades I-II) above/below surgical site for pain modulation
  - ice/modalities
  - Light work simulation activities → full duty work simulation

**Suggested Components for Daily HEP:**
- Stretches, ROM (progress to maintenance therapy)
- Trunk, LE strengthening, stabilization (progress to maintenance therapy)
- Proper lifting and functional movement
- Progressive walking program
## Recommendations for return to work based on physical demand:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work Type:</th>
<th>Return to Work:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sedentary (&lt;10lbs) or Light (frequently 10lbs, occasionally 20lbs)</td>
<td>Between 6-12 weeks with limited sitting duration for 30-45 minutes and consider restricted work hours if lifting is involved for 2-3 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate (frequently 20lbs, occasionally 50lbs)</td>
<td>Between 6-12 weeks patient may return to light duty if available – no lifting &gt;20 lbs and may consider restricted work hours</td>
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<td>12+ weeks: Increase weight tolerance every other week by 5 lbs</td>
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<td>After 24+ weeks: Return to full duty if tolerable</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heavy (frequently 50lbs, occasionally 100lbs)</td>
<td>6-12 weeks, patient may return to light duty if available – no lifting &gt;20 lbs and may consider restricted work hours</td>
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References:


Selkowitz DM, Kulig K, Poppert EM, Flanagan SP, Matthews ND, Beneck GJ, Popovich JM, Lona JR, Yamada KA, Burke WS, Ervin C, Powers CM. The immediate and long-term effects of exercise and
