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Cervical Spinal Fusion

The Cervical Spine

The cervical spine refers to the neck. The cervical spine begins at the base of the skull and serves as a bridge between the brain and the rest of the body. While a strain or sprain of the cervical spine may result in acute neck that gets better in time, a larger problem with the cervical spine often results in chronic neck pain.

Cervical Spine Anatomy consists of seven vertebral bodies (C1-C7). Irritation to any of these vertebrae in the neck may lead to different types of cervical spine pain. Examine the cervical spine, what conditions may cause a cervical fusion injury then determine the need of having cervical fusion surgery.

Surgery Overview

Cervical spinal fusion (arthrodesis) is a surgery that joins selected bones in the neck . There are different methods of performing a

cervical spinal fusion:

Bone can be taken from elsewhere in your body or obtained from a bone bank (a bone graft). The bone is used to make a bridge between vertebrae that are next to each other (adjacent). This bone graft stimulates the growth of new bone. Man-made (artificial) fusion materials may also be used.

- * Metal implants can be used to hold the vertebrae together until new bone grows between them.
- * Metal plates can be screwed into the bone, joining adjacent vertebrae.
- * An entire vertebra can be removed, and the spine then fused.
- * A spinal disc can be removed and the adjacent vertebrae fused.

This procedure can be performed through an incision on the front (anterior) or back (posterior) of the neck.

What To Expect After Surgery

This surgery usually requires a short stay in the hospital. You may need to wear a brace on your neck (cervical collar) during recovery.

Why It Is Done

Cervical spinal fusion may be done:

- * After an injury, to stabilize the neck and prevent a bone fracture from causing instability or damage to the spinal cord, which may result in paralysis.

- * To treat conditions such as misalignment of the vertebrae.

- * As a follow-up procedure to treat spinal stenosis, a herniated disc, the effects of rheumatoid arthritis, an infection, tumors, or spinal deformities.

How Well It Works

Cervical spinal fusion is usually successful in relieving symptoms, but complications sometimes occur. Repeat surgery is sometimes needed to address complications or recurrence.

Risks

Although cervical spinal fusion stiffens part of the neck, this does not reduce neck flexibility for most people.

Surgery and the use of anesthesia involve some risk. The risks associated with this procedure vary depending on your age and overall health, diagnosis, and type of procedure used. Risks include:

- * Pain in a bone graft site (donor site).
- * Failure of the fusion, breakage of metal implants (if used), or both.
- * Blood clots in deep veins.
- * Nerve or spinal cord injury.
- * Graft rejection.
- * Infection.
- * Excessive bleeding.
- * Risks of general anesthesia.

What To Think About

Cervical spinal fusion is sometimes used:

- * To treat acute injuries, such as fractures and dislocations.
- * For mechanical or structural problems causing disabling pain (such as from cancer or infection).

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