

Back surgery stoplight tool

Which zone are you in today: **green**, **yellow** or **red**?

Doctor/Provider: _____

Phone: _____



Green Zone

I'm feeling good.

- My incision site is closed, clean, and slightly pink with only a little swelling or tenderness.
- I am gradually increasing my activity each day.
- I am able to maintain an acceptable pain level with my current treatment plan.
- My acceptable pain range is _____ to _____.
- I am able to have regular bowel movements (BM).

How I'll prevent symptoms today

I will:

- Keep my incision clean and care for it the way my doctor/provider has recommended.
- Avoid heavy lifting, bending, twisting, or reaching motions.
- Wear the brace my provider has recommended as directed (if applicable).
- Move my body by taking short walks, but only where paths are clear and free of tripping hazards.
- Do only the activities my doctor/provider says are safe.
- Take my daily medicine as directed.
- Keep my doctor/provider appointments.
- Do my cough and deep breathing exercises or use hand-held breathing device.



Yellow Zone

I'm not feeling good.

- My incision has liquid draining from it, looks red, feels warm, or has a bad smell.
- I am running a fever greater than 101°F, have a cough, and it is harder to breathe with activities.
- I have not had a regular bowel movement within the past 3 days.
- I am not able to maintain an acceptable pain range with my current treatment plan.
- I am having a headache, nausea or light sensitivity not relieved by medicine.

Caution!

Take action TODAY. I will:

- Continue taking my medication as directed.
- Report these symptoms to my doctor/provider without delay **AND** call my doctor/provider if my symptoms do not improve after following my treatment plan.

- _____
- _____



Red Zone

I feel awful!

- I have sudden onset of numbness or tingling in my legs or feet.
- I have severe pain, warm to touch or severe swelling in my thigh or calf that does not get better with elevating my leg.
- I am having chest pain, arm or jaw pain/numbness, or trouble breathing.
- I had a fall after my back surgery.

Get help!

Take action NOW.

- **Call 911 or seek medical care RIGHT AWAY**
- While getting help, do this:

- _____
- _____
- _____