

Foramen Magnum Decompression Surgery

Information for Patients and Carers

What is Foramen Magnum Decompression?

The Foramen Magnum is the opening at the base of the skull through which the spinal cord passes. A Foramen Magnum Decompression is a surgical procedure that aims to create more space by removing a small section of bone.

This surgery is commonly used to treat a Chiari Malformation. This is where a small part of the brain pushes down into the spinal canal.

Why do I need this surgery?

This surgery aims to improve your symptoms. You may suffer from headaches, dizziness, neck pain and reduced balance or changes in your walking. Sometimes you may have very mild symptoms however the Chiari Malformation is picked up on a scan. This can often be the case for a patient with scoliosis (S shaped curved spine) who may be considering orthopaedic management of their spine. The Chiari Malformation must be treated first before undergoing scoliosis surgery.

What happens when you arrive for your surgery?

On your arrival you will be met by the ward team. A doctor, nurse and physiotherapist will meet you the day before your surgery to complete an assessment with you. On the day of your surgery you will be required to fast from food and drink. The nursing staff will advise you of your fasting times and restrictions.

You and/or your parent/ carer will sit down with a member of the medical team to discuss the consent form and sign it before your surgery.

About the surgery

You will be asleep throughout your surgery and carefully monitored by theatre staff. A small section of hair at the back of your head will be shaved. The surgery will last a couple of hours.

You will return to the ward where you will be closely looked after by nursing staff. You will have stitches at the base of the back of your head and down the top of the back of your neck covered by a dressing to keep it clean. You will wake up after surgery and are likely to feel a little groggy/ sleepy. You will have medicines to help with the pain and ensure you are comfortable.

Physiotherapy

The next day you will be seen by a physiotherapist. They will listen to your chest and may go through some breathing exercises to help keep your chest clear. For example, blowing bubbles or the exercises below:

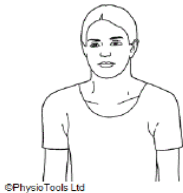
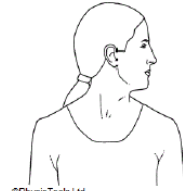
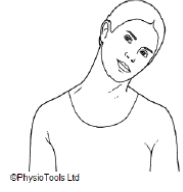
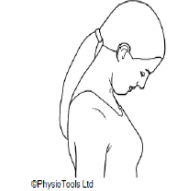
Deep Breathing Exercises:



- Lying or sit in a comfortable position
- Place your hands on your tummy
- Take a deep breath in through your nose and hold for 2-3 seconds
- Gently blow out through your mouth
- Repeat for 3 breaths. Rest for a minute. Repeat again if required.

The physiotherapist will have a look at how well you can move your neck. Your neck may feel stiff and sore. The physiotherapist will go through the neck exercises below:

Neck Exercises

All exercises should be done carefully. There will be some mild discomfort and this is normal. Slow and gentle movements are advised. The exercises can be preformed in sitting or lying. Start each exercise sitting or lying straight and tall with your head in the middle. Complete 2 – 3 times daily.

Shoulder Rolls Roll your shoulders in both directions. Repeat 5 – 10 times.	 ©PhysioTools Ltd
Neck Rotation Slowly turn your head towards your shoulder. Hold for 5 seconds. Slowly return to the middle. Repeat 5 times.	 ©PhysioTools Ltd
Neck Side Bend Slowly drop your ear towards your shoulder. Hold for 5 seconds. Slowly return to the middle. Repeat 5 times to each side.	 ©PhysioTools Ltd
Neck Flexion Slowly bring your chin to your chest. Hold for 5 seconds. Slowly return to the middle. Repeat 5 times.	 ©PhysioTools Ltd

<p>Neck Extension</p> <p>Slowly tilt your head back. Hold for 5 seconds. Slowly return to the middle. Repeat 5 times.</p>	 <p>©PhysioTools Ltd</p>
<p>Chin Tucks</p> <p>Pull your chin inwards as if to make a double chin. Keep your neck and back straight. Hold for 5 seconds. Repeat 5 – 10 times.</p>	 <p>©PhysioTools Ltd</p>

Your physiotherapist will also complete an assessment after your surgery. They will assess your arms, legs, balance and mobility to help you get back on your feet. Over the next couple of days the physiotherapist will monitor your balance and mobility. You will practise using the stairs if required.

Follow-up Care

You will come back to the ward for a Wound Review a few days after discharge. Your doctor may wish to follow you up in clinic a few months later if required. If you struggle to regain normal neck movement you can contact the Physiotherapy Department for a review.

Back to normal life

Slowly build your daily activities by walking a little more and joining in everyday tasks. You will be able to have a wash 2-3 days after your surgery and able to wash your hair after 10 days. You can return back to school once you feel well enough.

Getting back to sport:

- Make sure the wound is fully healed before going swimming
- Avoid contact sports until at least 3 months after your surgery

Any more questions?

Contact the Physiotherapy Department on **0131 312 1079**. Alternatively, contact the Neurology ward for general queries related to your surgery on **0131 312 1333**.