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Braces for Your Neck advanced level

Overview

Your doctor may prescribe a neck or back brace for you to wear after a spinal injury or surgery. A brace does three things:

1. immobilizes your spine during healing
2. stabilizes injured areas
3. controls pain by restricting movement

Braces, also called orthotics, are made from a variety of materials such as elastic cotton/nylon, foam rubber, and molded plastic. An orthotist is a medical professional that specializes in making custom molded braces, adjusting their fit, and providing tips for comfort and proper wear.

Braces can be worn on any section of the spine (cervical, thoracic, lumbar, sacral) and are named for the area of the spine to which they are applied. Common spine orthoses include:

- Cervical (Miami J, Philadelphia collar)
- Cervical-thoracic (Minerva, SOMI)
- Halo ring (Bremner, PMT)
- Thoracic-lumbar-sacral orthosis (TLSO)
- Lumbar-sacral orthosis (LSO)

Neck (cervical) braces

Rigid braces are made from molded plastic with a removable padded liner in two pieces—a front and back piece—fastened with Velcro. This brace is used to restrict neck movement during recovery from a fracture or surgery (e.g., fusion). Common rigid braces are the Philadelphia collar and the Miami J collar.



When to wear your brace

Know how to apply your brace before leaving the hospital. Wear your brace all the time— even during sleep—unless otherwise instructed by the surgeon. You will wear the brace until your spine has healed or fused, which may be as short as 4 weeks or as long as 4 to 6 months.

Applying your rigid brace

1. Begin by lying flat on the bed.
2. Slide the front half of the brace up your chest wall until it's firmly under your chin.
3. If present, attach the elastic strap behind your neck to the other side.
4. Apply the back half of the brace in the proper position on your neck.
5. Fasten the Velcro straps tightly.

Brace care

Wash and deodorize your brace with a mild soap and damp cloth every day. If your brace has padded liners, let air dry or use a hair dryer on "cool" setting.

Activity

Your brace will restrict your ability to move. You'll not be able to see your feet, so take care when walking. Avoid extreme bending and twisting of your spine. When moving from a lying to a standing position, use your arm and leg muscles to keep your spine in proper alignment. Follow your doctor or physical therapist's instructions about exercise.

Restrictions

You should postpone sexual activity until your follow-up appointment unless your surgeon specifies otherwise. Also, do not drive. When riding in a car, do not ride in the front seat with an air bag.



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Skin care/bathing

Follow your doctor's instructions for when you may remove your brace to shower and shave. Wash your hair with dry shampoo products until your incision has healed. Afterward you may shower and wash your hair with the brace on. After showering, lie on a bed and have someone remove the brace—do not move, replace the padded liner with a dry one, and reapply the brace.

Watch for reddened or broken skin under the brace. Skin breakdown can be caused by rubbing, pressure, or moisture. This may indicate that the brace does not fit properly or is not being worn properly. An orthotist can adjust the fit and provide tips for comfort and proper wear.

When to call your orthotist

If your brace feels loose, keeps riding up, is painful, or you have reddened or broken skin under the brace, call the orthotist for an adjustment. The orthotist will also provide more liners for the brace.



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