

Education

Spinal Instrumentation

What is spinal instrumentation?

The use of hooks, rods, or wire for spinal surgery is called spinal instrumentation. These instruments help stabilize and strengthen the spine. Your surgeon will decide in each case which type of instrument to use. For example, one or more rods may be used to attach the bones of the spine together. Or, sometimes, rods are placed on each side of the spine and attached with hooks to the backbones.

When is spinal instrumentation used?

There are many conditions that may require surgery to stabilize the back. Spinal instrumentation is often used to help people with broken backs or necks. People who have a degenerative disease of the spine may also need it. A degenerative disease is one that gets worse instead of better, such as arthritis. It may also be used to treat birth defects, Marfan syndrome, tumors, scoliosis, and neuromuscular disease.

Instruments are often used during spinal fusion surgery. A spinal fusion is when some of the back bones, called vertebrae, are fused together. During the surgery the rods or other support instruments are placed in the back to keep the back stable.

What happens after the procedure?

After a spinal surgery, you can usually go home in 5 to 7 days. You will have special instructions and activity restrictions while you continue to heal. The recovery time depends on the type of instrumentation used, the specific problem that was corrected, and your age and health. In some cases you will need to wear a cast or brace after surgery. You will not be able to play contact sports and will be told to avoid situations that put stress on the spine. Most people who have spinal instrumentation surgery do well. The scars on the back are usually small.

When should I call my health care provider?

Call your health care provider or surgeon if you develop any of the following problems:

- Fevers or chills
- Signs of infection over the surgery site such as redness, bleeding, swelling, or foul-smelling drainage from the site
- Any other questions or concerns

Sports Medicine Advisor 2006.4; Copyright © 2006 McKesson Corporation and/or one of its subsidiaries. All Rights Reserved. Written by Lee Mancini, MD. This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.