

## Cervical-thoracic Braces

### Overview

Your doctor may prescribe a brace for you to wear after a spinal injury or surgery. It will immobilize your spine while you heal and will control pain by restricting your movement.

A medical professional will help provide you with the type of brace that is the most appropriate and comfortable for you. This will maximize your benefit from the brace and enable you to use it with few adjustments.

### Cervical-thoracic braces

Injuries or fusion surgeries involving the neck (cervical spine) and upper back (thoracic spine) require a special cervical-thoracic brace to restrict neck and upper back movement. This rigid brace has a plastic padded chest jacket in two pieces—a front and back piece – fastened with Velcro straps. Supports for the chin and back of the head arise from the chest jacket.

Cervical-thoracic braces connect the neck portion of the brace to the back portion of the brace. Here is a common example of a cervical-thoracic brace:



Instructions for putting on and removing this type of brace can be viewed by clicking [here](#).

### When to wear your brace

**It is important to follow your doctor's specific instructions for when and how to wear your brace – especially when sleeping, showering, and engaging in certain activities.**

Learn how to wear your brace during your fitting for the brace. After surgery you will wear the brace until your spine has healed or fused, a period that can range from 4 weeks to 6 months. If you are fitted for your brace prior to surgery, practice taking it on and off to increase your familiarity with it. Do not discontinue wearing the brace until your doctor has instructed you to do so.

### Brace care

To clean your brace, wipe it with a mild soap and damp cloth every day. If your brace has padded liners, allow it to air dry or use a hair dryer on the cool setting. Do not place your brace or the pads in a clothes dryer.

### Activity

Your brace will restrict your ability to move. You will not be able to see your feet, so take care when walking. Avoid steps and curbs until you are comfortable. When moving from a lying to a standing position, use your arm and leg muscles to keep your spine in proper alignment and “log” roll. Follow your physician's or physical therapist's instructions about exercise.

### Showering / skin care

You may remove the brace to shower or sleep unless your surgeon states otherwise. Watch for reddened or irritated skin under the brace. Someone should check areas you cannot see. Skin breakdown may indicate that the brace does not fit properly.

### Icing while wearing your brace

You may apply ice while wearing the brace. Place a cold pack inside a pillow case and place it over the area where you are experiencing pain. Place the brace over the top of the cold pack.

## Brace weaning tips

- **Start on the date recommended by your surgeon.**
- Start slowly. Remove the brace for 1 hour each morning and evening. Wear the brace during the most active parts of the day.
- Add 30 to 60 brace-free minutes to each morning and evening session every day as tolerated. At this pace, it should take you 1 to 2 weeks to wean completely.
- Expect some increase in pain through the weaning process.
- Use ice as instructed.

## Sources & links

If you have questions, please contact Semmes Murphey at 901-522-7700.

## Glossary

**cervical:** the neck portion of the spine made up of seven vertebrae.

**lumbar:** lower portion of the spine made up of 5 vertebrae; connects with the fused bones of the sacrum below.

**orthotic:** another name for a brace

**orthotist:** a medical professional who specializes in making custom molded braces.

**sacral:** the five vertebrae at the base of the spine that provide attachment for the iliac (hip) bones and protect the pelvic organs.

**thoracic:** the middle portion of the spine made up of 12 vertebrae.



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