Cervical Foraminotomy Physical Therapy Prescription

The intent of this protocol is to provide guidelines for rehab. It’s not intended as a substitute for clinical decision making.

If any of the following occur, contact Dr. Poulter and hold off on physical therapy:

- Any signs of infection
- Worsening of radicular symptoms, including progressive weakness
- Unexpectedly high self-reports of pain in comparison to pre-surgical state

Phase I (0 to 2 Weeks): Protective Phase

Precautions
- Avoid bending, twisting, lifting, pushing and pulling **25 pounds or more for six weeks**.
- Limit sitting, including in the car, to no more than 30 minutes at a time (standing/walk breaks).
- No specific cervical exercises in first two weeks, cardio and scapular retractions only.

Goals
- Diminish pain/inflammation and minimize upper extremity radiating symptoms (ice, modalities as needed).
- Learn correct posture, body mechanics, transfers.
- Focus on cardio exercise program, increasing tolerance to 30 minutes, two times a day.

Education
- **Postural Education**: Sitting posture with lumbar roll at all times; frequent change in positions, avoid prolonged flexion (books, phones, iPads, etc.), sleeping positions
- **Body Mechanics**: Light lifting, transfers (include log rolling), positioning, etc.
- **Driving**: When off narcotic pain medicine

Exercises
- **Cardio**: Walking or stationary bike two times a day, 10 minutes each session to start
- **Scapular Retractions**: Emphasis on neuromuscular control (eliminate shrug), 10” isometrics
- **Light Stretching**: Pecs only (eg.: supine over towel)
Phase II (2 to 6 Weeks): Strengthening Phase

Therapy
- Starting at week two, two to three times per week, four or more times a week

Precautions
- Keep spine in neutral and good posture for strengthening with a focus on proper neuromuscular control
- Lifting, pushing and pulling less than 25 pounds until six weeks
- Gentle active range of motion only (no passive stretching nor aggressive range of motion)

Goals
- Patient to have proper neuromuscular control and posture with stabilization and strength exercises
- Initiate light strengthening and progress to independent with long term home exercise program
- Release soft tissue restrictions/muscle spasm/scar
- Body mechanics review
- Increase aerobic endurance to more than 30 minutes

Flexibility
- **Cervical Active Range of Motion:** Emphasis on retractions, gentle range of motion only
- **Stretching:** Pecs, thoracic extensions
- **Neural mobilization:** Performed as needed, gentle with caution not to flare up nerve roots

Manual Therapy
- Sound assisted soft tissue mobilization for restriction and spasm

Strength
*Only initiate these once patient can complete Phase I exercises. Then begin with light resistance and slowly progress. Emphasize good posture and correct muscle firing of scapula stabilizers during each exercise. (This is not a complete list.)*

- **Postural/Scapula Strengthening**
  - Scapular retractions first (eliminate shrug)
  - Prone scapula strengthening
  - Theraband rows, extensions, external rotation, horizontal abductions, etc.
  - Transverse abdominis isometrics first, then progression
  - Machine rows, lateral pull down (keep bar in front of the head), free motion machine, etc.

- **Cervical Postural Strengthening**
  - **Deep Cervical Flexors:** Emphasis on correct neuromuscular control, 10” isometrics to start
  - Prone on elbows, quadruped, modified plank position with 10” retraction isometrics
  - **Swiss Ball:** Seated, quadruped stabilization exercises
  - Seated retractions against Theraband
  - Cervical isometrics (if needed)

Cardio
- Should be continued to be done daily working up to at least 30 minutes per day (emphasis on walking or stationary bike to start).
- Time frames may vary per patient, consult with Dr. Poulter if you have questions (eg.: an avid cyclist with proper bike fit might start sooner).
- Emphasize correct form and equipment setup (eg.: elliptical, bike, walking terrain, etc.).
- When initiating running and sports listed on the following page, slowly increase in the six to eight week time frame.
Aquatic Physical Therapy *(more than three weeks, if available, once incision has healed)*
- Transverse abdominis bracing during all exercises and good head position
- Walking all directions, balance, lower extremity and upper extremity strengthening

**Phase III (6+ Weeks): Return to Work/Work Conditioning/Return to Sport (if applicable)**
- No lifting restrictions after six weeks.
- Continue to progress strengthening exercises from Phase II.
- Continue any manual therapy, stretching, etc. from Phase II as appropriate.
- Functional/sport/job drills may begin now with supervision. See time frames above for sport time frames.
- Possible referral to work reconditioning program.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>No Earlier Than:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walking Progression</td>
<td>At least 30 minutes a day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stationary Bike</td>
<td>Gradual increase in resistance at four weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilates (Neutral Spine)</td>
<td>Four weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor Biking</td>
<td>Four weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiking</td>
<td>Four weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elliptical</td>
<td>Six weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skiing</td>
<td>Six weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yoga</td>
<td>Six weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>Six to eight week progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running</td>
<td>Six to eight week progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soccer/Basketball</td>
<td>Six to eight week progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Golf</td>
<td>Six to eight week progression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>