Darin W. Allred, MD
ORTHOPEDIC SURGERY & SPORTS MEDICINE

Hand or Wrist Surgery Post-Op Instructions

Upper-extremity surgery.

Food

Start slowly. It's natural to want to eat a lot after surgery, but start with small amounts of your normal food, and eat more as your nausea improves.

Dressing

If you have a cast or splint, leave it on until your post-operative visit. If you do not have a splint, you may remove the dressing and shower after 48 hours, but leave the Steri-Strips or glue in place. You may let water run over the incision, but do not soak it in a bath, swimming pool, lake, or hot tub for three weeks. Keep a Band-Aid on the incision until it is no longer draining (about 7 days).

Activity

Stay as active as your pain and swelling allow. Keep your arm elevated to reduce swelling and pain.

Blood Clots

Blood clots are rare after upper-extremity surgery. However, if you or your family have a history of blood clots — or any other reason for increased clotting risk — you may need more aggressive treatment; please discuss this with Dr. Allred within 24 hours after surgery. What does a blood clot feel like? Blood clots usually (though not always) appear a few weeks after surgery. They typically cause new arm pain and new hand swelling, and rarely cause shortness of breath. If you think you may have a blood clot, call the office immediately during office hours, or go to the ER after hours.

Swelling

The best way to reduce swelling is to elevate your hand. Ice also helps if you do not have a cast or splint.

Physical Therapy

We will arrange physical therapy, if needed, at your first post-operative visit.

Medications

For the best pain control, alternate over-the-counter ibuprofen and Tylenol — for example, take regular Tylenol, then ibuprofen 2 hours later. Do not take more than the daily dose shown on the label for either one. While taking ibuprofen, I also recommend over-the-counter Pepcid or another antacid to help prevent a stomach ulcer. For prescription pain medicine (narcotics), see below.

Narcotics

You may need narcotics for a few days, but the sooner you stop using them, the better you will feel. Refills are rarely needed. We do not refill these medications after hours or on weekends, and a refill takes about 72 hours, so please plan ahead. If you take narcotic medications regularly, you will need to make arrangements with your regular prescribing provider.

Post Operative Visits

If you have a splint or cast, call for an appointment 1 week after surgery. If you do not have a splint or cast, call for an appointment 2 weeks after surgery.

Precautionary Measures

1. To prevent infection, you were given IV antibiotics before your surgery.
2. To prevent blood clots, stay active. Walk around your living room once every hour while you are awake.
3. If you are taking narcotic pain medication (such as Percocet or Vicodin), you may need a laxative to prevent constipation. We recommend an over-the-counter stimulant laxative such as Senna. Narcotics slow the bowel down, and Senna works by stimulating it. Fiber-only products (like Metamucil) usually aren't enough on their own, since they add bulk but don't stimulate the bowel.

When to Call / Emergencies

Call the office or go to the ER if you experience any of the following:

- Incision opens
- Increased redness at incision site
- Pain uncontrolled by pain medicine
- Uncontrollable bleeding
- Fever > 101.5°F or shaking chills
- Difficulty breathing or chest pain
- New arm pain or hand swelling
- Painful swelling

If this is a life-threatening emergency, call 911.