



## Post-Op Instructions

### Elbow, Hand & Wrist Surgery

## After Your Surgery—Days 1–7

- **Diet** – Clear liquids, progressing to regular diet as tolerated.
- **Medication** – Take pain medication as instructed.
- **Dressing and splint care**
  - You'll have a bulky dressing and splint.
  - Keep dressing clean, dry and intact until follow-up appointment.
  - Wrap your splint in plastic wrap when showering.
  - Small amounts of drainage are normal.
- **Ice and elevation**
  - Use ice and elevation throughout the healing process.
  - Use 1 to 2 pillows for at least 24 hours post-op – helps relieve swelling and pain.
- **Activities**
  - No strenuous activity or heavy lifting until cleared by surgeon.
  - Wiggle fingers (piano fashion).
  - It's important to begin moving your fingers. Our goal is to have full finger flexion and extension by your follow-up appointment. It is easier to use your opposite hand to gently stretch the fingers.
- **Follow-up appointment** – You'll have a follow-up appointment in 7- 10 days.
- **You must keep your splint on at all times until your followup.**

It is common to have post-operative pain. You may wrap a bag of frozen peas or crushed ice in a thin towel and place on your incision for 15 minutes of every hour while you are awake. Elevating your

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elbow above heart level on several pillows will also help with post-operative pain. You should take the prescribed medication only as needed and as prescribed. Do not take Ibuprofen, advil or aleve for the first 3 weeks. Numbness in your fingers can be normal after surgery and is due to the use of numbing medicine (Marcaine) around the surgery site to assist in postoperative pain control. The feeling usually comes back to normal within 24 hours.

## After Your Surgery — Weeks 1-4

- **Follow-up appointment**
  - Incision will be inspected.
  - Sutures will be removed.
- **Exercises** – 5 to 10 repetitions, 3 times a day
  - Range of motion exercises
    - Rotate your wrist up and down, side to side
    - Stretch your fingers apart, relax them, stretch again
    - Stretch your thumb by pulling it back, hold it, then release and repeat
  - Strengthening exercises
    - Squeeze a rubber ball
    - Wrist curls with no weight
    - No lifting for 8 weeks
- After the first week we sometimes remove the splint and begin specific motion depending on your injury and repair
- You will wear a special elbow brace fitted at the 1-2 week mark
- At 6 weeks you will be allowed to bend the elbow past 90 degrees of flexion. Again, you are allowed to fully straighten the elbow passively after the 1<sup>st</sup> week
- Gentle resistance exercises are usually started at 12 weeks

## Scar Management and Desensitization

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- **Scar tissue management and desensitization –week 4**
  - Scar massage – Apply vitamin E lotion or cream to your scar in a circular motion (firmly) for 5 minutes at least 4 times per day.
  - Desensitization – Rub the scar site for one minute every day.
  - Continue with scar massage for 6 months after surgery.

Over time, the scar tissue matures and becomes less pliable. As it tightens, scar tissue can:

- Interfere with achieving full range of motion
- Cause pain
- Cause hypersensitivity on or around the scar surface

Often, the surgical site/scar and surrounding tissue are left feeling hypersensitive because the scar tissue and swelling have interrupted your skin's sensory nerve fibers.

Performing scar massage and desensitization techniques can help your sensory nerves to normalize and function properly again.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Can I drive after surgery?

You may not drive yourself home from surgery. You must have a driver.

*You may not drive when you are taking narcotic pain medication.*

Your surgeon will tell you how long after your surgery until you can drive again. The legal position is that it's the patient who makes

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the decision as to whether you are safe to drive.

### **How long will I be off work after surgery?**

When you can return to work depends on your progress, as assessed by your surgeon. Generally, you can return to work in 1 to 2 weeks.

### **Call Immediately If You Experience**

- Severe pain or swelling
- Nail discoloration from pink to white or blue
- Excessive bleeding or drainage
- Increased redness
- Fever of 101°F or greater

If any of these signs appear, consult your physician immediately