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Hand & Wrist - Post-Op Instructions

Hand & Wrist Surgery

After Your Surgery—Days 1–14

- **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 hand 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.
- **Follow-up appointment** – You'll have a follow-up appointment in 10 to 14 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 hand 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. If you are having increased pain, you may take an anti-inflammatory medication such as Advil, Motrin or Aleve with your pain medication but DO NOT take Tylenol if you are

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prescribed Norco OR Hydrocodone the pain medication prescribed. Numbness in your fingers is expected after surgery and is due to the use of numbing medicine (Marcaine) around the surgery site and to numb the nerve to assist in postoperative pain control. The feeling usually comes back to normal within 24-48 hours.

After Your Surgery — Weeks 2–4

- **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
 - Wrist curls with no weight
 - No lifting for 6-8 weeks
- **Scar tissue management and desensitization**
 - 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.

Scar Management and Desensitization

Two days after your sutures are removed, if the skin is completely closed, you will need to start massaging the scar. You will place your finger on the scar, and maintaining pressure move your finger in circles, diagonals, up and down, and side to side. Do this all along the

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length of the scar. Do not rub the skin, move the skin.

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 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

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- 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

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