

Hand/ Wrist/ Elbow Postoperative Program- PLEASE READ !

Page 1 of 2

- **Keep the hand elevated above the level of your heart (at shoulder level) as much as possible, especially for the first 48-72 hours. A sling is good while standing/ walking/ in a car for 1 week. After a week the sling is not needed and it is best to use it as little as possible. If you are sitting, take the sling off and use pillows. Spending most of the first 24 hours on the couch with the hand somewhat elevated at shoulder level is good, higher is not necessary. Sleep normally, do not worry about elevating the hand during sleep.**
- **An ice pack/ frozen vegetables on the surgical area for 20-30 minutes at a time 2 to 8 times a day likely will help reduce pain and swelling a lot during the first 48-72 hours. Surgery involving the tip of a finger should not be iced.**
- **In most cases pain increases substantially a few hours after surgery as the local anesthetic wears off - this is normal.**
- **A lot of swelling of the hand and fingers may be seen after even small procedures. This usually starts a few hours after surgery, and peaks on the first or second day after surgery. Ice and elevation and anti-inflammatory medication (discussed on the next page) will help reduce this. Bruising near or under the bandage is generally normal.**
- **Moving the fingers frequently, if possible, helps the swelling and decreases stiffness, even if it is uncomfortable to move the fingers.**
- **Keep the dressing clean and dry. When showering or bathing cover the surgical bandage using a plastic bag secured with rubber bands.**
- **For many procedures (carpal tunnel, trigger finger, DeQuervain's) you should remove all dressings and wash the incision with soap and water starting on the 5th to 7th day after surgery. Some bleeding at this point is not unusual. After that you can cover the incision with a band-aid or gauze but let it air out a few times a day, and especially if at home or at night leave it open to air.**
- **Surgery for fractures, ulnar nerve, Dupuytren's, thumb arthroplasty, tendon or nerve repair: do NOT change the dressing.**

Page 2 of 2

- Take prescribed pain medicine as needed if the pain is severe. All narcotics, including Norco (hydrocodone), Percocet (oxycodone) or tramadol will cause nausea, itching and constipation. If taking one of these use extra Tylenol/acetaminophen sparingly.
- I strongly recommend taking an anti-inflammatory such as Advil (ibuprofen 200mg) 3 tablets 3 times a day or Aleve (naproxen 220mg) 2 tablets 2 times a day, after surgery (with food), unless you have an ulcer/ stomach sensitivity. This will decrease the pain further, help with swelling, and reduce the need for strong pain medication. Do not take Advil or Aleve if you are also taking a prescription anti-inflammatory (Naprosyn, Ibuprofen Mobic Celebrex, Indocin, Voltaren pills, etc.) There is no problem taking an anti-inflammatory at the same time as the prescription pain medication which is a narcotic.
- Blood thinners you were taking before surgery can and should be re-started the evening after your surgery.
- Numbness and tingling in the fingers is common in the first day or two and generally improves with time and elevation.
- Itching and nausea are often caused by narcotic pain medication and anesthesia. Benadryl can be helpful for itching. Nausea is short-term and generally does not require treatment with medication.
- Intense exercise/workout should be avoided for the first 3 days; it can increase swelling and occasionally cause bleeding of the incision.
- Please contact us if you experience unexplained high fever, severe increase in pain, or red streaking of the operated arm.
- If the elastic (Ace) wrap feels too tight, you can carefully unwrap it and re-wrap it more loosely without disturbing the dressing underneath.
- The postoperative appointment was made at the preop visit, call the office in a few days during business hours if you cannot find it, it is usually 10-14 days after surgery.

Call our main office at 818-902-2800 for any urgent questions