

# Postoperative hand surgery instructions

Your first follow-up visit should be in approximately 7 to 14 days. Call your surgeon's office if you are unsure about your appointment or if you have questions about your operation. It is possible that you will be seen by a hand therapist before you see the doctor. This is usually arranged before the operation. If you have questions, please call 503-316-3831 during business hours.

**Elevate:** Elevate the hand above the heart for at least 48 hours. A marble should be able to roll down hill from your fingertips to your shoulder without travelling uphill. Ideally, when walking or standing, the arm needs to be above your head, not resting on your chest. It takes hours of elevation to decrease the swelling that occurs within minutes of the hand being down too low. Resting the wrist or forearm on top of your head is a good way to keep it elevated when standing. Elevation will decrease pain, decrease complications and increase motion after the operation. **Elevation is the most important way to control swelling and help significantly with pain.**

**Swelling:** Swelling in the hand and fingers always occurs after surgery. The swelling can be quite impressive. The most common cause is failure to adequately elevate the hand/arm after surgery. Some discoloration (black and blue fingers or forearm) may occur and is normal after surgery.

**Ice:** Apply ice in a bag on the elbow crease or to palm side of the wrist to help with pain control. Do this during the first several days after the operation.

**Pain:** After your operation, no pain medication is capable of taking away all of the pain. However, taking the pills at regular intervals without missing doses will give you the best chance of controlling the pain. You may alternate different pain medications if directed by your surgeon. Elevation and ice placed at the inside of the elbow or wrist will help reduce the pain.

**Dressing:** Keep the dressing clean and dry at all times and leave in place until your follow-up, unless you are instructed otherwise. If the dressing feels too tight or is rubbing the skin and causing irritation, the bandage may be partially cut or loosened. It will then need to be rewrapped or taped. Most dressings will be left in place until the first postoperative appointment.

**Finger exercises:** To help reduce swelling, do finger exercises while the arm is kept elevated. Although painful, you should try bending the fingers into the palm and straightening them as much as possible. This quickens your recovery time and results in less pain later. Do these exercises for five minutes every one to two hours. Move any joints that are not immobilized through as full a range of motion as possible.

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**Awareness:** If you have any new numbness in your fingers, your fingertips turn from pink to white or blue, or if you see new, bright red bleeding soaking through the dressing, call the doctor **immediately**. If you develop chest pain, shortness of breath, or other serious and acute symptoms, call 911. If any of your usual medical problems flare up after your operation, call the doctor who normally takes care of those problems for you.

If your anesthesia involved a breathing tube of any kind, you may be hoarse or have a sore throat. Lozenges will help with this.

Do not try to eat too much food too soon. This may result in nausea due to the narcotic pain medications and anesthesia.

**Prescription refills:** Please plan ahead for prescription refills. If you anticipate running out of medication, call your pharmacy for a refill. You should allow 48 hours (two business days) for processing and communication with your pharmacy. Please note the stronger types of pain medication cannot be refilled over the telephone — a new written prescription must be obtained from your surgeon. Calling your pharmacy early will allow sufficient time for you to obtain this prescription.

**Contacting your surgeon:** If you need to reach your surgeon or their staff, please contact 503-316-3831.