

Brachial Plexus Post-Op Instructions

Overview:

You have had surgery on your brachial plexus above your collar bone. In general, this is a big operation in an area with important structures. It is common to take at least 6-8 weeks off work and some patients require longer.

After Surgery:

Immediately after surgery you may be in a sling to reduce the motion of your shoulder. Some patients do not need a sling and your arm might be free to move. It is important to do only gentle movements with your arm, and do not lift your arm above your head for the first few days.

It is very common to feel fatigued after surgery. Fatigue is normal for the first few days and should gradually improve over 6-8 weeks. However, if you feel short of breath or are having difficulty breathing you should call 9-1-1 or visit the emergency department.

You may want to arrange for assistance at home, as many activities around the home are strenuous after this operation and you may be essentially one-handed.

Activity and Care at Home:

For the first 2 weeks after surgery, you should move your elbow, wrist, and arm (including fingers) very gently to make full movements many times a day. You should not use it for heavy lifting or gripping, or strenuous activity. In general, any heavy lifting or gripping could cause bleeding, hematoma (a collection of blood at the surgical area), and possible infection.

Two weeks after surgery you may begin gentle stretches of the shoulder and lift your arm above your head.

Do not do any activity that hurts or causes pain at your surgery site.

You will see your surgeon two weeks after your operation. Physical therapy will be discussed at this visit and can be arranged if needed. Depending on your operation, there may be a very specific guideline for physical therapy to optimize your recovery, and the office can provide this for the physical therapist.

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Incision Care:

You will be discharged from hospital with surgical dressings in place, and possibly with a drain. You may remove the covering dressings from your incisions and drains after 72 hours to shower; do not soak or swim for at least two weeks or 72 hours after your drains have been removed. After removing these covering dressings, you should see plastic (purple Prineo) or paper tapes (Steristrips) over your surgical incision and a suture holding your drain. Shower with these in place and pat them dry after your shower. After showering, you do not need to cover the tapes on your incision unless you wish. You should, however, always apply a clean bandage or gauze over your drain site.

Pain Management:

The first few days after your operation, you may have pain at the surgical site. The nerve pain that you may have had before should improve and it will be replaced by pain from the surgical release. It is common that there may be some numbness in the area of your operation for a while after surgery (depending on how tightly your nerve was compressed). This should get better over time but can take months to improve.

To manage pain, take acetaminophen (Tylenol), and Ibuprofen (Advil) together every 4-6 hours for the first 48 hours after your surgery and as directed on the packaging. If you are still in pain, you can also take one of your prescribed pain medications in addition to the Tylenol and ibuprofen. After 48 hours try to stop taking the prescription pain medication. Do not take more Tylenol or ibuprofen than the daily limit indicated on the packaging. Ice or cool compresses may help in the first couple of days, but do not leave ice on for longer than 10 minutes at a time.

IMPORTANT:

The surgery will be performed under general anaesthetic therefore must not operate motor vehicles, boats, power tools or machinery for the first 24 hours. You may drive after three days or when you are no longer taking narcotic pain medication.

If you experience increasing rather than decreasing pain, bleeding not controlled with pressure, excessive swelling or bruising, increased swelling or redness around the wound, increased drainage from incisions or in your drains, foul odour, fever, chills, please call your surgeon's office. If you experience shortness of breath, or arm or leg pain, call 9-1-1 or visit your emergency department.