

Hand/Wrist Surgery Post-Op Instructions

Overview:

You have had a hand or wrist surgery. Most patients after this operation will be in a firm cast or splint which should remain on until you follow up with your surgeon.

After Surgery:

You should expect to feel a bit of pain for the first two days. After this, your pain should significantly improve but you may require over the counter pain medication for a number of days.

Incision Care:

If you have a light bandage, this can come off in 24-48 hours and you can gently wash the incision line with soap and tap water. Dry the area really well and then apply Vaseline or antibiotic ointment and cover with a bandage. You may change this bandage as often as needed until your stitches are removed or have dissolved.

If you have a splint, this should stay on and dry until your first follow-up visit with either the doctor's office or hand therapy. You may have to protect it when bathing with a plastic cover bag.

Activity and Care at Home:

You should maintain a gentle level of activity until instructed by your doctor. The hand should be elevated as much as possible to minimize swelling. While sleeping you should have the hand elevated on pillows. If your fingers are outside of your splint you can gently move them, but do not use them for gripping, lifting, or strenuous activity.

Pain Management:

You will have freezing that lasts 1-8 hours that helps with your pain control. It is important that you not use the hand during this time. When the freezing wears off, you may feel tingling in your fingers. To manage pain, take Ibuprofen (Advil) and plain Tylenol every 6 hours for the first 48 hours. If that is not sufficient, then take the prescription medication. Do not take more Tylenol or ibuprofen than is recommended on the bottle in 24 hours. You can refer to the pain management handout. Generally, you will have pain for 24-48 hours then it should decrease significantly. A cool gel pack may also help with the swelling.

You should keep your hand elevated about the level of your heart. Slings are not needed.

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IMPORTANT:

The surgery may be performed under general anaesthetic therefore must not operate motor vehicles, boats, power tools or machinery for the first 24 hours.

If you have had hand surgery under a general anaesthetic or sedation you must not drive or operate other machinery for 24 hours after surgery. Please note that the Motor Vehicle Act of BC 195 (1) prohibits operation of a motor vehicle if "the control of the driver over the driving mechanism of the vehicle... is obstructed." Driving with a hand injury or cast in place that impairs your ability to hold the steering wheel is therefore in violation of the Act. You may resume driving once you have return of function to your operated hand and no longer require 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.