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**Elbow/Wrist/Hand - Post Op Instructions**

**General:**

Upper Extremity Surgery varies from relatively minor procedures performed with local anesthesia to major reconstruction. Although some patients can have minor procedures without much change from their usual activities it is wisest to resume activities gradually. Post operative rehabilitation maintains a balance between protecting the surgical site and resuming function. **Do Not** operate a motor vehicle or machinery and do not make any important decisions until the effects of anesthesia and pain medications have completely resolved (usually 48 hours).

**Activity:**

1. For the first 48 hours it is best to maintain a generally low level of activity, sitting or lying at home. You may walk as tolerated, but remember anesthesia and pain medications may impair your balance.

2. You may have a splint which is a rigid reinforcement of your surgical dressing. A splint holds the hand or arm in a particular position and prevents motion. Unless you are specifically told otherwise leave this in place until your post op office visit (usually 1 week after surgery) unless it becomes wet or soiled (see care of incisions).

3. Elevate the extremity to reduce pain and swelling!!! Raise your fingers and hand higher than your shoulder to allow tissue fluid (edema) to drain downhill. Unless your fingers are in a splint (Dupuytren’s Contracture or fracture) moving your fingers by slowly making a fist and straightening them will help reduce swelling. You may lower your hand, but when swelling occurs, you should elevate it again. Gradually you should be able to lower your hand for longer periods of time. Let pain and swelling be your guide!

4. Ice will help relieve pain and limit swelling. Apply an ice bag to the surgical area for 20 minutes every hour when awake. Do not apply the ice directly to the skin; place a towel or washcloth between the ice bag and your skin. Apply ice regularly the first 2-3 days and then as needed.

5. You may use a sling occasionally to support your arm, but remember this holds your arm lower than your heart and may cause swelling. If your hand swells, you should elevate it as in #3 above.

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**Diet:**

1. It is best to start by drinking fluids because some people become nauseated after anesthesia. You may advance to regular food as quickly as you feel able.

2. Do Not drink alcoholic beverages for at least 48 hours after surgery.

3. If you become nauseated, do not eat solid foods; try to drink small amounts of clear liquid (water, 7up, or broth) frequently to avoid becoming dehydrated. If you are still nauseated 24 hours after surgery call our office.

**Pain Control:**

1. The degree of pain following surgery is extremely variable from person to person depending on the specific procedure

2. Regional anesthesia (blocks) may decrease post-operative pain.

3. We usually inject a long-acting local anesthetic at the end of the procedure which helps decrease pain.

4. Two general types of medication may be used.

A.) Anti-inflammatory medications (Acetaminophen, Ketorolac, Naproxen, Ibuprofen, etc.) These should be taken as directed, with food. If these meds upset your stomach or you notice bloody or tarry stools stop taking them.

B.) Opiates (Oxycodone, Hydrocodone, or Codeine) These meds may cause drowsiness and will impair your ability to perform tasks or drive. Opiates often cause constipation and may cause nausea.

5. If the pain is intolerable despite usual measures it may be a sign of serious problems and should not be ignored. Severe pain may be due to overuse of the arm or leaving it hanging down too long. If your pain is not improved to a tolerable level with elevation, ice and medication call our office or go to an emergency room.

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**Care of Incisions:**

1. You may be instructed to remove your dressing 48 hours after surgery or to leave them in place until your first post op office visit.

2. If there is any fresh blood or fluid draining from your incision keep it dry

and cover it with a dry sterile bandage.

3. If your incision is dry you may shower unless instructed otherwise. Try to get as little water as possible on your incision and dry it promptly and thoroughly. Do not submerge it in water in a sink, tub or pool.

4. If your dressing becomes wet with blood or other liquid or becomes soiled remove the dressing and replace it with sterile bandages. If you remove a splint call our office.

5. If your incisions become red and warm or if you have severe pain or fever call our office or go to an emergency room.

**Exercise:**

1. Progressive exercise is important to regain function as the surgical site heals. Gentile exercise can begin soon after surgery to decrease swelling and stiffness.

2. Unless your fingers are immobilized by a splint slowly make a fist as much as you can and slowly straighten your fingers 10 times each hour when awake.

3. Many patients can restore function by performing exercises themselves but some receive outpatient therapy. At your post op visits you will be instructed to perform exercised yourself and/or referred to therapy.

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