

# After Your Hand Surgery

## For patients going home after surgery

Read this brochure to learn about:

- How to take care of yourself at home
- What activities are safe
- How to cope with pain
- Problems to watch for
- What to know about your follow-up visit

### **You have had an anesthetic or narcotic medicine.**



- Do not drive a car or drink alcohol for 24 hours.
- Have a responsible adult stay with you overnight.





## **What can I eat and drink after my surgery?**

You can return to eating and drinking what you usually would right away. It is best to start with a light meal.

### **If you feel nauseated (sick to your stomach) or you are vomiting, you can:**

- buy anti-nausea medicine such as Gravol from your pharmacy without a prescription. Take the anti-nausea medicine as directed on the bottle.
- keep drinking liquids until the nausea passes.
- when the nausea passes, gradually start to eat what you usually do.



## **How much activity is safe?**

### **When you go home, rest on the first day.**

- Gradually return to doing your everyday activities, but be careful with your operated hand.

### **Swelling is normal after hand or wrist surgery.**

- Keep your hand raised above your heart to prevent more swelling.
- When you are sitting or lying down you can keep your hand raised by placing it on 2 or 3 pillows.

### **Do not lift with the operated hand.**

- Do not carry groceries, small children, pets or heavy items.

**Do not do any strenuous activities or exercises** such as weight lifting, shoveling snow or swimming.

**Continue to move your elbow and shoulder** to avoid getting stiff.

## Should I move my fingers?

- If your fingers are not covered by your hand dressing, you can move them when the numbness is gone.
- If your fingers are completely covered under the dressing, do not move them until you return to see your surgeon or hand therapist.

## When can I return to work or play sports?

Your surgeon will tell you when it is safe for you to return to work or play sports again.



## How do I take care of my wound?

- Always keep your hand bandage clean and dry.
- Leave the bandage on until you return for your follow-up appointment.
- If your surgeon has told you to remove the bandage, follow your surgeon's instructions about how to remove it safely.
- **If you have steri-strips** under the dressing, leave them in place. When they start to peel off (usually 7 to 10 days after your surgery), remove them and throw them away.
- **If you have stitches**, they will be removed at your follow-up appointment.

## What if I need hand therapy?

Your surgeon will arrange for you to have hand therapy with a hand therapist if you need it.



## How do I take a shower?

You can take a shower 24 hours after your surgery.

### Do not take baths.

To take a shower safely:

- Before you shower, wrap your operated arm or hand in plastic (such as a plastic bag) to protect the area. Remove the plastic wrap after your shower.
- Keep the dressing on until it is taken off by your surgeon or the stitches have been removed. This is usually 10 days after your surgery.
- You may receive other instructions about how to care for your dressing.

## How do I cope with pain?

Pain is normal after hand surgery. Your pain should start to feel a little better every day.

We may give you a prescription for your pain. Take the prescription to a pharmacy and follow the directions for taking the medication.

### If you had a regional block

- If your arm or hand was frozen with a medicine, it will take a few hours for the feeling in your arm or hand to return to normal. It will feel numb and weak and you will have no control of your arm or hand.



**Important:** If the numbness or tingling in your arm or hand has not gone away 24 hours after your surgery, call your surgeon's office.

**Protect your arm and hand from being bumped.** You could hurt yourself without feeling it while it is still numb. Wear your arm sling while your arm or hand is numb.

Remove the sling and throw it away when you have full control of your operated arm.

**Be careful with things that are hot,** like tea or coffee. You could burn yourself without feeling it.

When you start to feel tingling (pins and needles) this means the regional block is wearing off and you should start to take your pain medication.

- Take the pain medication every 4 hours for the first 24 to 48 hours if you are feeling pain.
- After the first 24 to 48 hours, you can slowly take less pain medication as your pain gets better.
- Take less and less until you don't need any pain medication at all.

### **If you did not get a pain medication prescription**

- You can take Tylenol Extra Strength and Advil (ibuprofen) as directed on the bottle.
- It is best to take your pain medication before you do any activity that may cause more pain, such as physiotherapy.

### **Pain medications can make you constipated.**

To prevent constipation:

- Drink lots of fluids (3 to 5 glasses of water every day. Each glass should be about 8 ounces).
- Eat foods that are high in fibre such as bran and fruit.
- If you have not had a bowel movement within 72 hours after surgery, take Milk of Magnesia as directed on the bottle. You can buy this from your pharmacy without a prescription.

**Some pain medications can cause nausea and vomiting.**

You can take anti-nausea medication such as Gravol.



### **Problems to watch for**

**Call your surgeon, family doctor or come to the Toronto Western Hospital emergency department if you notice these problems.**

**If you are from out of town, go to your nearest emergency department.**

- Numbness or tingling in your arm or hand that has not gone away 24 hours after your surgery.
- A lot of pain that does not get better when you take your pain medication.
- Bleeding from the operated hand. Try putting pressure on the area for 15 minutes. If the bleeding does not stop and soaks the dressing, call your surgeon, the resident on call, or go to the emergency department
- Bluish skin or cold fingers (a change in the colour, feeling, or movement of your fingers)
- Fever (temperature higher than 38 °C or 101 °F)

## My follow-up visit

If you do not have a follow-up appointment, please call your surgeon's office to make one.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

### Hand Clinic

East Wing – 2nd Floor

399 Bathurst Street, Toronto Western Hospital

- Dr. Anastakis            416 603 5790
- Dr. Baltzer                416 603 5449
- Dr. Chan                    416 603 5641
- Dr. McCabe                416 603 5455
- Dr. Paul                    416 603 5839
- Dr. Von Schroeder    437 219 2552
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- **Altum Health:** If you are getting follow-up care at Altum Health, they will call you with the date, time and location of your appointment.



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