Instructions for patients going home

Read this brochure to learn about:

• How to take care of yourself at home
• What activities are safe
• How to take your medication
• Problems to watch for

Do not drive a car or drink alcohol for 24 hours after your surgery.
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 go back 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.

Don't lift with the operated hand.

- Don't carry groceries, children or pets.

Don't 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, remove it as instructed.

- **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 next 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 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.

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.

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 or call 416-340-3155 and ask to speak to the Hand Program resident on call. Or, go to the nearest hospital emergency department if you have:

- 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 (a temperature higher than 38 °C or 101 °F)

My follow-up appointment

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

Date: _____________________________ Time: ___________________

Doctor: ____________________________________________________

Clinic: ____________________________________________________

Location: ____________________________________________________
Special instructions for you

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