Home Care after Hand Surgery  
For Plastic Surgery Patients

This handout was written to help you care for yourself at home after hand surgery. A nurse will review this with you. If you have any questions or concerns after you go home, please call the numbers at the end of this handout.

Your surgery was done to return your hand to the best possible level of function. Healing time varies with each patient.

Making Yourself Comfortable

You may need to use narcotic pain medicine at home. If keeping your arm up does not reduce pain and swelling, use pain medicine as ordered. Over time, you should no longer need pain medicine. Keep in mind that the medicine may cause you to be lightheaded, unsteady on your feet and/or constipated. Do not do things that require coordination when you are taking narcotic pain medicine.

Daily Care

Caring for Your Incision
Caring for your incision helps prevent infection. Below are steps to follow to take care of your incision. If you have a cast, you will also be given a handout on cast care.

• In most cases, a dry dressing with an ace bandage will cover your incision until you see your doctor. The dressings should be kept dry and clean.

• Do not remove your ace wrap or splint unless you've been told to do so.

• To keep your dressing or cast dry when you shower, wrap a plastic bag around your hand or arm to keep the dressing or cast dry. Then use adhesive tape to seal the edge and keep the bag in place.

• Wear loose fitting clothing that is easy to fit or slip over your cast or ace wrap. Sweat suits or cuffed-sleeved shirts work well.

Taking your Temperature
• Check your temperature daily for 1 week.

Checking your Fingers
• Some of the numbness and tingling you had before surgery may still be present. This should go away over a period of weeks. There may be some discoloration after the surgery.
• Check your fingers twice a day. Be alert to changes. Watch for:
  - Increased swelling
  - Increased numbness
  - Increased tingling
  - Decreased warmth

If you notice any of these signs, call your doctor right away.

**Reduce Swelling**

When you are up more and use your hand and arm, you may have some swelling and soreness in your hand. This is normal. Keep your arm raised and the swelling will decrease. Wear your sling when you're up. Raise your arm when you're resting. **Your hand should always be above your heart.**

**To wear the sling:**
- Keep your elbow low, near your waist;
- Adjust the sling so that your hand is elevated across your chest - almost to the opposite shoulder.

**Activity Level**

Common sense will tell you when you overdo it. Yet, too little activity can delay the return of your strength and stamina.

Continue doing your exercises. They are needed to recover. You will most likely not be able to move your fingers or use your hand for 3 weeks. Then you will work with the therapists to slowly regain your strength and coordination.

You will be given special instructions about:
- Doing housework.
- Driving a car.
- When you can return to work or school. The length of time needed before you can return to work varies, depending on your recovery and the type of work you do.
- Doing light or strenuous activities.

**Eating & Drinking**

Eat a light meal the first night you are home. Then resume your usual eating habits.

Drink at least two 8-ounce glasses of fluid your first night home.

Do not drink any alcohol for 48 hours or until you stop taking pain medicine. Alcohol does not mix well with pain medicine and may make you sick.

**When to Call the Doctor**

- If there is drainage from your incision. Be ready to tell what the drainage looks like and the amount.
- If your incision becomes more painful, red and/or swollen.
- If you notice increased swelling, numbness, tingling, or decreased warmth in your fingers.
- If your temperature goes above 100.5°F.
- If your cast becomes wet and changes shape, moves or breaks
Follow-Up Clinic Visits

You will return to see your doctor on ______________________ at ______________

Depending on your surgery and healing, your doctor will have you see the therapists for strengthening and coordination exercises. Your doctor and nurse will talk with you about exercise at your clinic visit.

Phone Numbers

You are welcome to call anytime you have questions about your surgery.

Your doctor's name is ______________________; the office number is (608) 263-7502, 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., weekdays.

After hours and weekends, the clinic number will give you the hospital paging operator. Ask for plastic surgery resident on-call. Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

If you live outside of the area call: Toll free number: 1 (800) 323-8942