Home Care after Orthopedic Hand Surgery

A nurse will go over this information with you. If you have any questions or concerns after you go home, please call the numbers listed at the end of this handout.

Making Yourself Comfortable
- Rest and relax the first day. You will need to use your other hand and arm more.
- Keep your arm elevated on several pillows so your arm is above the level of your heart.
- Use the sling to hold your arm up when you are not supporting it with pillows.
- Take the pain medicine as ordered. Do not take aspirin or aspirin-containing products for one week. If you have severe pain, call your doctor.

Special Care

Check your fingers - Feel your fingertips every 4-6 hours the first couple days. Check for warmth, and look at their color. After the first couple of days, look at your fingers twice a day. If you have increased swelling, numbness, tingling, a color or temperature change, call your doctor. The fingers should feel warm and the color should be your normal skin color. If you are concerned, call your doctor.

Take your temperature - Take your temperature daily for a week. Call your doctor if your temperature is greater than 100.5°F or 38.1°C for 2 readings taken 4 hours apart.

Bulky dressing or cast - Talk with your doctor about how long your hand will have a dressing or cast. Many people have a dressing on for 1-2 weeks. If you have a cast, expect it to be on for about 3 weeks. Cover the dressing or cast with a plastic bag when you shower. If you accidentally get the cast wet, call your doctor.

Deep breathing - Clear your lungs by taking a deep breath, holding it for 10 seconds, and letting the air out slowly. Repeat this 5-6 times, 4 times a day – in the morning, at noon, in the afternoon, and before bedtime.

Daily Activities
- Do not drive while you are taking narcotic pain medicine.
- The first couple of days resume your usual routines slowly.
- You may move your fingers. Do not lift anything for 2 weeks.
- Ask your doctor about returning to work.
Eating & Drinking

- Eat a light meal the first night you are home. Then, you may resume your normal eating habits.
- Drink two (8-ounce) glasses of fluid your first evening home.
- Do not drink any alcohol for 48 hours or until you stop taking pain medicine. It does not mix well with pain medicines and may make you sick.

Follow-Up

- You will have a drain in your wrist. This drain will be removed in the Orthopedic Clinic or the emergency room the next morning. If you live out of town, you may want to stay in Madison overnight. Guest services can arrange your stay at a discount rate or provide you with a list of nearby motels. Numbers are listed below.
- You will return to clinic in 1-2 weeks to have your dressing and your stitches removed. You will be placed in a short arm cast. You will return to clinic 2-3 weeks later for cast removal.
- After the cast is removed, you can slowly increase the use of your hand as you are able.

When to Call the Doctor, your Doctor’s name is __________________________

- Excess swelling or increased numbness not made better by elevating the hand and moving the fingers.
- Bleeding.
- Cool fingertips.
- A color change in your hand or fingers.
- Signs of infection in the incision.
  - Warmth and/or redness.
  - Cloudy, pus-like drainage.
  - Excessive swelling.
  - Fever-temperature above 100.5°F or 38.1°C for two reading taken 4 hours apart.
- Your splint is too tight, too loose, broken, or wet.

Phone Numbers

Guest Services – Hospital (608)-263-0315. The American Center (608)-440-6242.

If you have questions or concerns, please call the Orthopedic Clinic weekdays between 8:00 am and 4:30 pm. Receptionist: (608) 263-7540.

After hours and weekends: Call (608) 262-0486. This will give you the hospital paging operator. Ask for the orthopedic resident on-call. Leave your name and phone number. The doctor will call you back. If you live out of the area, call 1-800-323-8942.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright ©/2015 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#4238.