
Hand and Upper Extremity Clinic

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Distal Radius Fracture ORIF Surgery **Post Surgery Information and Care**

Post-op care for a distal radius fracture ORIF includes keeping the splint clean and dry, elevating the arm to manage swelling, and moving your fingers, shoulder, and elbow to prevent stiffness. Do not bear weight on the arm, lift anything, or soak the incision. Be sure to take all prescribed medications, including stool softeners if you are taking narcotics, and follow your surgeon's instructions regarding follow-up appointments and physical therapy.

General care

- **Splint/Cast:** Keep the splint or dressing clean, dry, and intact until your follow-up appointment. Do not remove it or get it wet.
- **Swelling:** Elevate your arm above the level of your heart as often as possible, especially in the first few days. Ice packs wrapped in a towel can be applied over the splint for 20 minutes at a time, several times a day.
- **Pain management:** Take your prescribed pain medication as directed. Use over-the-counter pain relievers like Ibuprofen if advised by your doctor, and take a stool softener if on narcotics to prevent constipation.
- **Incision:** Expect some normal drainage. Do not apply ointments to the incision or remove any dressings yourself. Do not soak the wound in a pool, hot tub, or bathtub until your surgeon says it's safe.
- **Smoking:** Do not smoke, as it significantly interferes with bone healing.

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Activity and exercise

- **Finger exercises:** Gently and actively move your fingers (flexion, extension) at least 10 times every hour to prevent stiffness.
- **Other movements:** Gently move your shoulder and elbow within the limits of your comfort to prevent stiffness.
- **Avoid:** Do not drive while taking narcotic pain medication. Do not lift, push, pull, or put any weight on your surgical arm until your doctor clears you. This restriction can last for several weeks.
- **Physical Therapy:** Follow your surgeon's instructions regarding physical therapy, which will likely begin in a few weeks. You will be instructed on how to begin gentle range of motion and strengthening exercises as healing progresses.

When to call the doctor

- If you have uncontrollable pain.
- If you have a fever or increasing redness and swelling.
- If you have any concerns about your dressing or splint.