



## **General Discharge Instructions Following Upper Extremity Surgery:**

### Pain Management

- If you received a peripheral nerve block, the pain relief may last from 4-36 hours. Furthermore, you may not have sensation or movement in your arm for the same amount of time.
- You will have pain after the pain block wears off. Anticipate this and start your pain medication prior to the block wearing off.
- It is important to control your pain after surgery. Take your first dose of the prescribed pain medication as soon as you get home, even if you have no pain.
- Continue to take your pain medication as prescribed for 48 hours after surgery. Make sure that you are alert and are not having any difficulty breathing before taking the medication.
- You can expect the first night will be the most painful and uncomfortable if you have NOT had a pain block. You have been given narcotic pain medication to take home and make you as comfortable as possible, but you may still have some break through pain.
- After the first 48 hours, you may take the pain medication as needed for pain.

### Antibiotics

- IV antibiotics are given at the time of surgery and are chosen based upon any allergies you may have. Normally, you will not be sent home with any antibiotics.

### Activity

- NO WEIGHT BEARING on your operated arm for 2 weeks after surgery, unless you have been instructed otherwise by your physician or the clinical assistant when your surgery was scheduled. This means you MAY NOT lift anything heavier than a coffee cup.
- Elevate your arm on pillows to keep it above the level of your heart as much as possible during the first 14 days following surgery or until you see your doctor in follow-up. The more you elevate your arm the more it will help to decrease the swelling and pain.
- Limit the amount of time your arm is dangling in a dependent position.
- Use the arm sling as directed by your surgeon.
- Ice can be very helpful in decreasing the pain and swelling of the arm. You may ice over the surgical site for 20 minutes and then remove the ice for 20 minutes. Repeat this sequence. DO NOT place ice directly on the skin.
- Wiggle your fingers at least every hour to maintain circulation, unless instructed NOT to do so by the surgeon.
- At your follow-up visit, your splint will be removed and you will get further instructions on how you will increase your activity.
- Remember: Do not do anything that hurts or makes your arm swell.

### Wound Care

- You may wake up from surgery with a splint on the surgical arm. This needs to stay in place and be kept clean and dry. You will follow up with the clinical assistant approximately 2 weeks after surgery and a cast or brace will be applied.
- Bleeding through the dressing is quite common following surgery. This normally occurs for the first 1-2 hours after surgery. The actual bleeding has stopped by the time you see the drainage through the dressing.
- Your dressing needs to be kept clean and dry at all times – DO NOT shower, bathe, or wet your dressings in any way.

### Tips on Caring for Your Splint / Cast

- Avoid getting your cast wet. Moisture softens the cast and damp padding can cause skin breakdown. If the cast becomes damp, use a hair dryer on a cool setting to dry the area.
- Plastic bags are good covering in wet weather, but will not protect your cast if it is submerged in water.
- Do not swim with your cast.
- If the cast becomes rough on the edges, cover the rough area with smooth adhesive tape.
- Do not pull the cast padding out.

### Caring for Your Skin While Wearing Your Splint /Cast

- Wash the skin area around the cast, taking care not to saturate the cast in the process.
- Lotion has a tendency to build up on the inside of the cast and become sticky, so it should never be used under or around the cast.
- If the edges of the cast are causing irritation to the skin, pad it with some soft material such as cotton or foam. Be sure the padding is well anchored to the cast and not bulky, as loose material slipping into the cast will cause even more irritation.
- If you notice any raw or open wounds, call the office.

### Important Things to Watch for and do

- Profuse bleeding. If the bleeding continues to soak through your dressing and increases in size on your dressing.
- Blue or white fingers. This indicates a lack of blood flow to the foot.
- Fever > 101.5° F. Fevers less than this are very common the first few days after surgery and are unlikely to indicate infection.
- Severe pain. If your pain does not improve after pain medication, except for the first night after surgery.
- If you note any of the above problems or concerns, please contact our office at (239) 325-4090. If you need to call after hours, a message will be given to the on-call nurse to contact you regarding your problem or concern. ***Please note the on-call nurse will not adjust or change your pain medications nor will they prescribe any new or different medications.*** If you are not able to reach anyone or you feel you have a medical emergency, please go to the nearest emergency room or call 911.

### Medications

- A narcotic pain medication prescription will be prescribed for you upon discharge from the hospital or surgery center. These medications are used to reduce your pain and must not be taken any more often than prescribed. Contact the office during normal business hours to have this medication adjusted or prior to running out. Pain medication will **NOT** be refilled after normal business hours. **No exceptions!**
- Pain medication should be taken with food as this will help to prevent any stomach upset.
- Do not drive while taking pain medications.
- Do not drink alcohol while taking pain medications.
- You may resume your routine medications unless otherwise instructed.
- Often pain medication and inactivity cause constipation. Eat high fiber foods (fresh fruits, vegetables, bran) and increase your fluid intake. You may also contact your pharmacy or family physician to determine what over the counter medication you are able to take to help with your constipation.

### Diet

- After having general anesthesia, gradually increase your diet as tolerated. Start with liquids, advance to soft foods and finally resume your regular diet. Avoid any spicy or greasy foods after surgery.

### Follow-up

- You should be seen in the office for follow-up 14 days following surgery. This appointment will be with the clinical assistant. Contact the office today if you have not already made this appointment at (239) 325-4090.
- At your follow-up appointment, your staples/sutures will be removed from your incision. This may be an uncomfortable experience. We would advise you to take your pain medication prior to your appointment.