

Riverview Health Orthopedics and Sports Medicine

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POSTOPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS
SHOULDER SURGERY
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Your recovery after shoulder surgery can take 6-9 months (and sometimes up to a year) to fully recover. It takes 12 weeks for the repair to fully heal, so it is very important to follow all precautions after surgery as directed. These instructions are intended to help you control swelling and pain, and to allow your shoulder and repaired tissues to heal. These instructions are a general guideline, because no patient or procedure is the same. If needed, your surgeon will give you further specific instructions.

YOUR POSTOPERATIVE APPOINTMENT

_____/_____/_____ AT _____

SLING

- You are required to wear your sling at all times (including sleeping) until your follow up appointment. This is necessary to protect your repair. You may remove it to work on your hand, wrist, and elbow exercises, for getting dressed, and for hygiene. Otherwise, it should remain on at all times. If a squeeze ball was provided with your sling, this should be squeezed as often as possible to help to reduce hand stiffness, and to reduce the swelling that may occur in the hand and wrist

ICE

- It is recommended to ice your shoulder for 20 minutes per hour using an ice pack, Cryo Cuff if provided, or a bag of frozen peas. Ice can be especially helpful for the first several days after surgery. It can then be used as needed for pain and swelling.

PAIN BLOCK/PAIN CATHETER

- The pain block/catheter is intended for pain relief and can last for up to 48 hours. During this time, you will not experience pain and will not be able to move your hand and fingers. It will give you the sensation of your arm being "paralyzed". **THIS IS TEMPORARY UNTIL THE BLOCK WEARS OFF.**
- It is recommended that you start your pain medication even though you are getting pain relief from the block. It is more difficult to control the pain once the block wears off, then to keep a constant level of the pain medication in your system.
- For further questions regarding the pain catheter or block, please refer to the pain pump handout given to you from surgery or contact the anesthesia department as directed in the handout.

MEDICATIONS

- You should resume all of your normal medications after shoulder surgery. If you are on blood thinners, these should be discussed with our team to decide on a date to resume them (typically the day after surgery).
- You will be given prescriptions for pain medications:
 - Fill the pain medications immediately and begin taking the medications before your nerve block wears off. You are encouraged to take the pain medications as directed on the prescription, and on a regular schedule for the first 3-4 days after surgery.
 - For the first few days, it is important to stay "ahead" of the pain, using your pain medicine. It is much more difficult to "catch up" to the pain.
 - **Depending on your allergies and medical history, you can add in either tylenol (acetaminophen) or Advil (ibuprofen) for supplemented pain control**
 - Even with the "nerve block" from surgery, it is recommended that you start on the pain medications after surgery to avoid the block wearing off without having pain medications in your system.
 - As the pain decreases, you may decrease the pain medication and switch to extra strength Tylenol if needed.
 - Avoid driving and consuming alcohol while taking pain medication.
 - Common side effects of pain medication are nausea, drowsiness, and constipation. Consider taking medication with food, and also consider using an over-the-counter stool softener.

DRESSING

- If you stay in the hospital, they will remove and replace your dressing before you leave.
- If you were discharged home same day, leave the dressing on for 3-5 days.
- You may shower and get your incision wet 3-5 days after surgery, as long as there is no drainage coming from the incision. If the dressing is leaking, remove it and apply a clean, dry gauze to your shoulder.
- Avoid letting the shower stream hit the incisions directly until the sutures are removed. DO NOT scrub incisions or soak under water (bathtub, swimming pool or hot tub etc.) Pat the shoulder dry and then re-apply the dressing.
- If you have drainage more than 5 days after surgery, please contact our office for advice.

SLEEPING

- You may find it more comfortable to sleep in a semi-reclined position (i.e.. recliner type chair or propped up on pillows) following shoulder surgery. You may return to sleeping in your bed whenever it feels comfortable to do so.

EXERCISES

- You should begin passive elbow, wrist, and hand exercises on the day of surgery. Remember no active motion of the shoulder or elbow (moving the arm without assistance from someone else) until follow up. These may be repeated throughout the

day as you feel needed. These exercises are to make sure your hand, and elbow do not get stiff in your sling.

- We will make specific recommendations about physical therapy at your first postoperative appointment.

FOLLOW UP APPOINTMENTS

- Your first follow up appointment is generally 10-14 days after surgery. If you do not have an appointment, contact the office after surgery to confirm this appointment at 317-770-3777
- Please call ASAP to schedule your physical therapy appointment to begin in ____ weeks. If you need assistance with finding a PT location, please call our office. If your PT prescription was provided the day of surgery, please refer to that for specific instructions.
 - Please wait until after first follow up appointment for physical therapy instructions
 - If you are not doing PT at a Riverview facility, please have your therapist contact our office (317-770-3777) for a protocol.
 - Wound care, pain management, and a review of your surgical procedure will be discussed at your first post-operative appointment
 - Additional appointments are scheduled according to the type of surgery that you had and how you are progressing.

PRECAUTIONS

- After anesthesia, rest for 24 hours. General anesthesia may cause a sore throat, jaw discomfort or muscle aches. These symptoms can last for one or two days. **Do not drive, drink alcoholic beverages or make any important or legal decisions during this time.**
- Do not put your hand behind your back (tucking in shirt, putting on belt), and do not lean on affected hand/arm or use your hand/arm to push up from a seated or lying position. A good general rule is to keep your arm where you can see it.
- Keep your first few meals after surgery light and drink plenty of fluids, and some people are nauseous after surgery.
- **Smoking increases your risk of infection and can delay healing times. If you smoke, you are encouraged to quit, cut back or at least quit smoking during the post-operative period.**
- Pain medications are important for the first few days after surgery to treat postoperative pain. Addiction, tolerance, and side effects are a big concern. Decrease the pain medications as soon as you can. This is typically after the first few days. Most patients require narcotic pain medications only for the first few weeks after surgery (even large procedures). Prolonged use increases the risk of problems with these medications.

MOST COMMON POST-OPERATIVE CONCERNS

- **Pain** - It is important to start your pain medication as soon as you can after surgery, even if you are not experiencing any pain. If you receive a block and when the block wears off,

there can be a heightened sense of pain. If this occurs, understand that this can be normal. Increase your pain medication to 2-3 oxycodone every 4 hours and 1 gabapentin every 8 hours. Do this for 1 day until the pain is manageable and then decrease back to normal dosing. You may also add in Advil (ibuprofen) or Tylenol (acetaminophen) for added pain relief.

- **Swelling** - Due to surgery, fluid may build up in your arm. Due to gravity and being in the sling, the swelling may move to your elbow and wrist/hand. This is normal. It is recommended that you do your hand/wrist and elbow exercises (shown above). This will help move the fluid back up your arm. Your body will naturally reabsorb the fluid over the first 1-2 weeks after surgery.
- **Nausea** - The pain medication can cause nausea/vomiting. It is suggested to take pain medication with food. We will also prescribe anti-nausea medication (ondansetron/promethazine). It is recommended to take this before taking pain medication
- **Constipation** - Pain medication can also cause constipation. We also prescribed constipation medication (docusate). It is recommended to take this medication, and plenty of water, the first few days after surgery until you have your first few bowel movements. If you have not had a bowel movement within 5 days after surgery, you can pick up over the counter Milk of Magnesia at any pharmacy. Make sure you stay hydrated.
- **Sleeping** - Due to the sling and pain, lack of sleep is a very common concern after shoulder surgery. We suggest sleeping in a recliner the first few days to weeks after surgery. We also suggest scheduling your pain medication so that you are taking it before bed if possible. The pain medication may cause you to be drowsy. We also suggest taking tylenol PM, Advil PM, or melatonin to assist with sleep.
- **Spasms** - Due to surgery, and your arm being in a sling, you may experience muscle spasms or cramps around your shoulder and arm. This is completely normal. If this happens, we suggest using a heating pad around these muscles for 20 minutes every hour when the cramping occurs. This will help relax the muscle.
- **Numbness/Tingling** - Due to swelling and being in a sling, you may notice some numbness and or tingling in your hand on the surgical side. This is normal and should decrease over time. If it fails to improve, please let us know
- **Driving** - We do not recommend driving during the period that you have to wear your sling. IF YOU ABSOLUTELY HAVE TO, then you can not be taking narcotics, you cannot drive a manual shift car, and you have to be able to safely operate your vehicle with one arm. We suggest going to an empty parking to get familiar driving with one arm

NOTIFY THE OFFICE IMMEDIATELY, 317-770-3777, IF YOU DEVELOP ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:

- Increased redness or swelling over the incision area
- Incision area is warm or hot to touch
- Incision has foul smelling drainage
- Relentless pain, nausea, vomiting, bleeding or drainage
- Severe calf pain or chest pain
- You develop a fever greater than 101.4 more than 48 hours after surgery

If you are having an emergency that requires immediate attention go to the nearest emergency room or call 911.