

Post-Operative Instructions for Carpal Tunnel Release

Purpose of surgery

The goal of the operation is to decompress the Median nerve at the level of your wrist to help relieve the pressure upon it. The consequence is the gradual decrease or elimination of symptoms like numbness/tingling, weakness, clumsiness, and pain.

What to expect after surgery?

You will have a soft dressing that covers the wound on your palm and part of your forearm. You may have some numbness or tingling of fingers due to the local anesthetic injections used to help control post-operative pain (this should wear off within about 24 hours).

What should you do to help recover?

While we do not anticipate significant swelling following this procedure, it would be helpful to keep your hand/wrist elevated as best you can for the first 24 hours after surgery. You can also apply an icepack or frozen vegetables to the palm side of the dressing at the level of your wrist to help keep swelling to a minimum.

To help your recovery, keep your fingers moving. Make sure you can make a fist with your fingers and completely straighten them. Make sure you can move your thumb across your hand towards your pinky finger and fully straighten it. Repeat these motions and efforts throughout the day, especially in the first few days following surgery to keep internal scarring from becoming an issue.

Keep your pain under control. While I do not anticipate significant pain, I want to make sure you are comfortable. Take the prescription pain medicine as prescribed for the first day and then decide the next day to what extent you need it. Keeping yourself comfortable will allow you to keep your fingers moving and minimize internal scarring from the surgery.

How should you take care of your dressing/wound?

Keep the dressing and all the skin covered, clean and dry for about five days. Afterwards, you may remove the dressing yourself prior to coming in for your first post-operative visit. The wound is covered by a non-adherent patch, followed by gauze, a wrap, a stocking, cotton wrap, and finally, the ACE wrap.

Once the surgical dressing is removed, keep the wound and your skin clean. Soap and water are an excellent skin cleanser, and it is OK to get everything wet in a shower with running water. Avoid immersing your wound under water until the skin looks well healed (1-3 weeks). Please do not use salves like Neosporin™ or Bacitracin™ for the wound. I would prefer soap and water or peroxide; and, I want you to keep it covered with a non-adherent bandage – your wound does not need air to heal, just cleanliness. The sutures are absorbable, and should ‘fall’ out by about 2-3 weeks and sometimes earlier.

How should my hand respond to the surgery?

As I probably explained to you in the office, the speed and extent of your recovery is somewhat variable, but very dependent upon the severity of your nerve test. Studies have demonstrated conclusively that the length of time for improvement is directly related to the severity of the nerve compression. The more severe your carpal tunnel syndrome, the longer it will take to reap the benefit of surgery. For those with severe carpal tunnel syndrome, and for those with any evidence of nerve damage, the recovery can occur over the course of one to two years. For those with minor or moderate carpal tunnel syndrome, the recovery usually occurs over the course of 6 months to a year; but most experience noticeable improvements within days to weeks.

For many, the earliest noticeable difference is the resolution of nighttime numbness and discomfort. This is usually recognized within one to two weeks. Daytime symptoms, clumsiness, and weakness will take longer. I expect that you will be resuming your regular activity as soon as you feel comfortable – and this definitely helps the overall recovery!

What should concern you?

Please refer to our website (www.HandCenterGA.com) for helping you to understand our general concerns following any operation. As for your carpal tunnel release, there are only a few things I would ask you to pay attention to should they occur: new numbness/tingling, worsening numbness/tingling, increasing pain, stiffness of fingers, progressive redness around the wound. I want you to call us should any of these occur at 404-255-0226.

When should you come in for your first Post-operative visit?

Your first visit will be within 7-10 days of the operation. That visit should be arranged during your pre-operative appointment. If not, call 404-255-0226 to make that appointment.

Do you need therapy?

Most people do not require therapy to recover from carpal tunnel release. On the other hand, I will offer it to you if you are having prolonged discomfort, persistent swelling, or trouble getting your fingers to move fully.

What activities can you do?

You can do anything that does not hurt with some exception. Avoid or limit repetitive activities like typing for about a week to keep from creating swelling that will prolong discomfort. Limit yourself to lifting with the operative hand for a few days or so until it becomes more comfortable. Everyone's pain threshold is different, but a reasonable guideline is limit yourself to about 1-2 pounds with the operative hand.