

Post-Operative Instructions for Fixation of Wrist Fractures

Purpose of surgery

The purpose of your surgery is to align your fracture so that it can heal in a suitable position for long-term function and mobility.

What to expect after surgery?

You will have a splint covering your forearm and wrist that is designed to rest your wrist and keep it from moving. The splint may go above the level of the elbow if at the time of surgery I discovered that your wrist was highly unstable and needs extra immobilization. You will also discover that you have wrappings around your fingers leaving your fingertips exposed. These wrappings are placed to limit finger swelling which often occurs following wrist trauma or surgery. This swelling could otherwise limit the flexibility of your fingers.

What should you do to help recover?

I do anticipate swelling after this operation so 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 dressing at the level of your wrist and opposite the side of the palm to help keep swelling to a minimum. The splints are usually thick, and if you try to put an icepack on the palm side of the wrist, it is unlikely to have any effect.

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.

The wraps on your fingers will limit full motion until you remove them which I want you to do after 2 days.

Keep your pain under control. I do expect that you will be sore for the first 3-5 days. Take the prescription pain medicine as prescribed for the first day, and decide the next to what extent you need it. If part of your anesthetic involved a 'block,' you will not realize much discomfort until the block wears off (6-18 hours). Do not wait until it does to take medicine, be pro-active and insure that you have pain medicine in your system before the block wears off. Keeping yourself comfortable will allow you to keep your fingers moving and minimize internal scarring from the surgery.

There is previous evidence supporting the notion that Vitamin C for the first 50 days after injury/surgery might help reduce the risk of pain syndromes, which are rare. 500mg of Vitamin C for 50 days has been the recommended dosage, but up to 1000mg per day is also acceptable. There is no need to augment your intake of Vitamin C if you already take a multivitamin with a sufficient amount. But, more recent studies cast doubt and argue against any correlation between taking Vitamin C and pain reduction. I think this is something you can do if you want to be very proactive; but, please do not feel that this is a must.

How should you take care of your dressing?

Keep the dressing, and all the skin covered, clean and dry. Keep the splint covered in a waterproof setup when showering. Your splint will not be removed until your first post-operative office visit. **I want you to remove the wraps on your fingers 2 days after surgery.**

What should concern you?

Please refer to our website (www.HandCenterGA.com) for helping you to understand our general concerns following any operation. I would want you to contact us should you experience persistent numbness/tingling of fingers, any increasing pain, and if the splint feels tight and is squeezing your wrist/forearm. Please call me at 404-255-0226 with any concerns.

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?

A formal, supervised therapy program is important to get the best result possible. I will make the referral either to one of our therapists, or if you come from a distance, to a therapist conveniently located to you.

What activities can you do?

I want you to curtail activities with the operative wrist. It is important that you limit lifting anything over ½ - 1 pound (depends on degree of comfort). Please do not lift anything over 1 pound. This will allow you to perform your activities of daily living like grooming, eating and dressing.

You may use a sling to support your arm if you are more comfortable that way, but you do not need to use it. You will likely enjoy the support for the first couple of days following surgery, though.