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DISCHARGE INSTRUCTIONS FOR UPPER EXTREMITY SURGERY

- Your doctor will want to see you in his clinic 8 to 10 days after your surgery. Please call 785 843-9125 or 800 843-6973 to schedule your postoperative appointment.

Activity Level

- _____ You may use your hand and forearm for **mild** use that is comfortable.
- _____ **Do not** use your shoulder.

Dressing and Splint Care

- _____ Wear your cast, splint, sling or brace at all times, unless instructed otherwise.
- _____ Keep your dressing and splint in place until your first office visit.
- _____ You may change your dressing in 2 to 3 days. Keep your incisions covered with dressings or band aids and an ace bandage (if applicable), until your sutures are removed. Do not place medication on your incisions.
- _____ Keep the surgical area dry. To bathe, place a plastic bag over the cast or splint and securely tape it above the cast. Shoulder surgery patients may cover the incisions with saran wrap and tape around the edges to seal completely. You may also shower by placing *waterproof band-aids* over each incision which will make a watertight seal. After showering remove them and cover the incisions with dressing sponges or regular band aids to allow the incisions to “breathe” while healing.

Elevation

Elevating is very important to help keep swelling and discomfort controlled. Elevate the affected extremity on pillows with fingertips pointing toward the ceiling. Do this as much as possible the first 3 to 5 days, then as needed to keep swelling minimized. It is not necessary to elevate at night, so you may sleep in a comfortable position. Wiggle your fingers and thumb frequently to help reduce swelling and to encourage range of motion. Shoulder surgery patients: You may be more comfortable in a semi-reclined position (recliner or prop up with pillows in bed or on the couch).

Ice

To help reduce pain and swelling, apply an ice bag to the surgical area for 15 to 20 minutes every 1 to 2 hours for the first 2 to 3 days. To avoid frostbite, place a towel between the ice bag and your skin. It is not necessary to use ice during the night. Continue to use ice 4 to 6 times daily the first week then as needed for as long as it is effective. Use ice during your rehab and physical therapy phone may continue to be helpful. Do not apply heat during your recovery.

Circulation

To encourage circulation and decrease swelling, wiggle your fingers, thumb, and wrist (if applicable) several times each hour. Check circulation by pressing on a fingernail for two seconds until it turns white, and then let go. If the nail turns pink in 3 to 4 seconds, it indicates adequate circulation.

Medication

- Your doctor will give you a written prescription for pain medicine as you leave the surgery center. Take as prescribed with food to help prevent stomach irritation.

- Pain medicine, general anaesthesia and inactivity may cause constipation. A diet consisting of fiber, whole grains, fresh fruit (except bananas) and fluids may prevent this. Walking around the house several times daily may also help. Call the office if this persists beyond three days.
- While you are asleep in the operating room, your doctors may inject a long-acting numbing medicine in the surgical area to help relieve your immediate postoperative discomfort. When you start to notice tingling, burning or throbbing, begin taking your pain medication. This allows it to become effective before the local anaesthesia wears off.
- *Shoulder surgery patients* will have a “shoulder block” done by an anesthesiologist before you go into the operating room. This procedure will be explained to you prior to the injection.

Cold Therapy Unit

We recommend cold therapy to help decrease swelling and reduce pain. The advantage of using this unit instead of ice bags is that the temperature can be controlled allowing continuous use four hours at a time. The thermometer built into the hose regulates the temperature, which should read 45 to 50 degrees for safe use. The motor will pump cold water through the hose to the pad positioned over your surgical site. Press the two release buttons to disconnect the pad from the hose to allow you to walk away from the hose and unit. Reconnect by pushing the ends together until they “click” into place.

Shoulder surgery patients: To continue use of the unit after your first dressing change, *place a towel between the ice pad and your skin*. Then position the pad over your shoulder and upper arm and hold it in place by wrapping an ace bandage around your upper arm to secure the pad.

- ✓ Instead of using ice cubes in the cooler until, we recommend filling plastic drink bottles with water and freezing them. Place three or four bottles in the cooler and as they thaw rotate with frozen ones.
- ✓ Be sure to always have a barrier between your skin and the ice pad to prevent skin irritation.
- ✓ Using cold therapy during the day will be sufficient but you may also use it at night if you like.
- ✓ **This may be used 3 to 5 days following surgery to maximize benefit. Cold packs may then be used if continued ice is desired. DO NOT USE HEAT DURING THE RECOVERY PHASE.**

Please call the office if you have

- ✓ Elevated temperature above 101 degrees.
- ✓ Bloody drainage that continues to soak the dressing.

Feel free to call our office with any concerns or questions that you may have.