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ARTHROSCOPIC ELBOW SURGERY

Introduction

The following information is provided to help you progress smoothly through your arthroscopic elbow surgery. Use this handout along with the pre-operative instruction sheet that will help you schedule your surgery, doctor visits, and physical therapy.

Before surgery

You are required to undergo a general medical evaluation prior to surgery. If you have any serious pre-existing medical condition(s), you may need to see your doctor(s) before going ahead with surgery.

As well, it is preferred that you meet with your physical therapist prior to your surgery. They will provide you with simple instructions for after surgery, as well as arrange your post-operative therapy sessions.

Anesthesia

You will meet the anesthesiologist on the day of your surgery. The specifics of the anesthesia used for your surgery will be discussed with you at that time. Typically, the operation is performed under a combination of regional anesthetic (nerve block) that will numb the elbow and forearm region, and a general anesthetic. The nerve block also provides pain relief after the procedure.

Surgery

Your operation will be done as an outpatient (you go home the same day). Arthroscopic elbow surgery is done through several (4-6) small incisions around the elbow. The surgery itself lasts 1-1 ½ hours.

Complications are **unusual** with arthroscopic elbow surgery, but can and occasionally do occur. Potential complications include bleeding, infection, side effects or complications from anesthesia, nerve injury or muscle weakness, stiffness, and persistent pain.

After surgery

You will be given a post-operative instruction sheet on the day of your surgery. This will give you specific information regarding the care of your incisions and the use of pain medication. Please refer to that sheet after your surgery.

You are required to wear a sling following your operation until the arm wakes up from the regional anesthetic block. After that, you typically discontinue using the sling. It is recommended you keep a compressive wrap around the forearm and arm to minimize swelling. This will be provided for you.

Your physical therapy begins 2-3 days after surgery. You will be given a therapy referral form on the day of your surgery. Please give this to your therapist at your first visit after surgery. It provides the therapist with specific instructions on rehabilitating your elbow. Typically, you attend physical therapy sessions 1-2 days per week for 4-6 weeks following surgery. This is adjusted according to your progress, and will be decided by you, the surgeon, and the therapist.

You will return to see the surgeon 1-2 days after surgery, to have your initial dressing changed. You will also see the surgeon at one week, 6 weeks, 3 months, and one year following surgery. The purpose of these visits is to monitor your progress, and ensure that you are making the smoothest and best possible recovery. It is important that you schedule and maintain these regular visits.

Activity

You will be allowed to perform most daily activities once you are comfortable. However, you should not progress beyond the activities recommended by your surgeon and therapist. People who have sedentary-type jobs (desk or computer work) are usually able to return in 3 to 5 days. Those who perform manual labor or jobs that involve heavier use of the elbow will be required to switch to "light duty", or avoid work altogether for anywhere from 4 weeks to 3 months. (Note: these times are estimates; you may recover at a slower or faster rate.)

Discomfort is not unusual as you recover after surgery. In many instances, this persists to some degree for 4-6 weeks following surgery. Any problems that continue beyond that point will be investigated accordingly.

Total recovery time following surgery is variable and depends on many factors. Most people return to unrestricted use of the elbow in 2-3 months after surgery. However, this depends greatly on the type of activity. Lighter activities recover more quickly; more strenuous activities take longer to return. In some situations, permanent limitations are recommended to prevent reinjury.

Questions

If you have any questions either before or after your surgery, do not hesitate to contact Dr. Lervick's office at **952-944-2519**