



## General Post-Operative Instructions Elbow Arthroscopy

**Ryan W. Hess, MD**

Dr. Hess Care Coordinator

Phone: 763-302-2223 | Fax: 763-302-2401

### WOUND CARE

- After surgery, wounds are typically covered with either soft dressings or the operative arm is placed in a splint.
  - If you are placed in a splint, this should be left in place until your follow-up appointment. Make sure to keep the splint clean and dry. When bathing, cover the splint to keep it dry and intact (some people use a plastic bag over the operative arm).
  - If you are not placed in a splint and have soft dressings, these should be left in place for 2-3 days after surgery. The dressing can then be removed and the incisions can be covered with waterproof band aids. Make sure to keep the dressings dry, and change them if they become wet or saturated.
- Do not stick anything into the ends of the splint. This can introduce bacteria or cause scratches which may cause an infection. A blow dryer on cool setting is suggested if itching occurs under the splint.

### DIET

- After surgery, some patients experience nausea. This can be related to anesthesia or pain medication. It is best to begin with clear liquids and light food (crackers). You may progress slowly to your normal diet if not nauseated.
- Patients are often prescribed an anti-nausea medication after surgery. This can be used to treat nausea. If nausea or vomiting persists despite medication, call the office.
- Pain medication can also cause constipation. An over-the-counter laxative, high-fiber diet or fruit juice may be helpful.

### MEDICATION

- Most home medications may be resumed the evening of surgery or the following day unless specifically directed by your surgeon or primary care provider.
- Typically, patients are given a prescription for narcotic pain medication. Most commonly, this is hydrocodone + Tylenol (Norco) or oxycodone + Tylenol (Percocet). This should be used as instructed if pain is not otherwise well-controlled. Typically, patients require narcotic pain medication for around 2-5 days following surgery.
- Try to take pain medication with food to help decrease nausea.
- Prescribed pain medication may already have Tylenol (Acetaminophen) mixed with it. Do not take any other medications that include Tylenol while taking these pain medications. Taking too much Tylenol can cause liver damage.

- Taking medication prior to bedtime may help with sleeping.
- Do not drink alcohol or drive while taking narcotic pain medication (hydrocodone, oxycodone, dilaudid, etc.).
- Pain medication typically takes about 30-45 minutes to take effect.
- Some patients may receive a nerve block prior to surgery. This block lasts a different length of time in each patient, but typically lasts 12-18 hours. When you begin to feel some tingling in the extremity, the block is beginning to wear off. This is a good time to begin taking oral pain medication.
- Pain medication likely will not take away all of your pain. It is okay and expected to have some discomfort.
- Because of the risks of prolonged narcotic use, in most cases narcotic pain medication will not be prescribed after 4-6 weeks from surgery. Plan to wean narcotic use after surgery accordingly.

## ACTIVITY

- A sling is typically used after surgery. You may use your hand, but do not lift anything more than 1-2 pounds with the operative arm.
- You are encouraged to open and close your hand to promote circulation and prevent stiffness.
- Return to work depends on your job requirements, specifics of your surgery and pain/swelling levels. This can be discussed at your follow-up appointment.
- Do not resume sports, use exercise equipment or perform strenuous physical activity (including lifting weights) until your surgeon says it is okay.
- Physical therapy is often prescribed after surgery. This is an important part of your recovery and we encourage patients to attend all physical therapy appointments.
- Return to driving after surgery is okay once narcotic pain medication has been stopped and you are cleared by your surgeon. The length of time until patients are able to return to driving varies depending on the specific surgery performed. This can be discussed with your surgeon during a clinic visit after surgery.

## REASONS TO CALL THE OFFICE

Please call the office for any of these concerns:

- Fever above 101.5°F
- Excess pain or swelling of the calf
- Excess drainage at surgical incisions
- Worsening pain at the operative site not controlled with medication
- Excess nausea/vomiting
- Numbness in the operative arm
  - Some numbness can be expected initially after surgery if a nerve block was used
- Redness around the incision site
- Any other questions or concerns

## FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENT

- A post-operative follow-up appointment will be made for you at the time your surgery is scheduled for after surgery. If you do not have an appointment scheduled after surgery, please call our office.