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Hand & Upper Extremity

Hand Surgery Post-Operative Recovery Instructions

My surgery: _____

How to manage pain and swelling:

While some pain and swelling is to be expected after surgery, follow these steps to minimize pain and enhance your recovery:

- When lying down or sitting, place as many pillows as needed under your arm to raise your hand above your heart level. Do this as much as possible, especially when sleeping for the first 7 days after your surgery.
- When walking, try to keep your elbow bent to prevent your arms from hanging down by your side. This prevents gravity from causing swelling of your thumb and fingers.
- Take your pain medications as prescribed. If you have been prescribed a narcotic (for example Norco, Percocet, etc.), take it only as needed in order to prevent side-effects such as drowsiness, nausea, and constipation. Instead, take Tylenol and/or Motrin as prescribed.
- If you were administered a nerve block in your arm to control your pain, note that numbness may last up to 24 hours. It is important to take your non-narcotic medications as prescribed until the nerve block begins to wear off in order to prevent sudden onset of pain.
- While not necessary, applying ice packs to your fingers and over your dressings for up to 20 minutes at a time may help reduce pain and swelling for some patients.
- If your pain is not improving with elevation, and even slowly worsening over the days, you may loosen (but do not remove) the ACE wrap around your dressing. Sometimes these can become tight especially with swelling.

How to prevent stiffness:

Stiffness of your fingers can be a major issue after hand and upper extremity surgery. In order to prevent this, follow these steps the day after surgery:

- If your fingers and thumb are free from your dressings, practice making a fist and straightening out your fingers for at least 2 minutes every 2 hours that you're awake. Continue this every day until your follow-up appointment.
- If your fingers and thumb are free from your dressings, continuing your daily activities such as typing, texting, eating, writing, etc. is encouraged and helps prevent stiffness.
- Follow the steps as mentioned in the previous section to reduce swelling. The less swelling in your fingers, the less likelihood of your fingers becoming stiff.

Dressings and splint care:

Follow these instructions for taking care of your post-operative dressings, unless otherwise specified:

- For carpal tunnel and trigger finger surgery, you may remove your post-operative dressings 7 days after surgery. After removing your dressings, place Band-Aid(s) to cover the incision. You may replace the Band-Aid every other day as needed. You

may shower or bathe but keep your incision clean and DRY until your follow-up appointment.

- For all other procedures, it is important to keep the dressings clean and DRY. You may shower or bathe, but should cover your dressings/splint to prevent it from getting wet. Ways to do this include covering your arm with a plastic bag and keeping it away from the water, or purchasing a water-tight cast cover for showering (these are also available online and fairly inexpensive).
- If your dressings accidentally loosen or come apart, you may overwrap your dressings with an ACE wrap bandage snugly.

Activity restrictions:

Follow these activity restrictions after your surgery until your first post-operative visit, unless otherwise specified:

- No sports or strenuous activity
- No lifting > 2 lbs (no heavier than a standard coffee mug) with your operative hand
- No driving for at least 24 hours after your surgery and no driving while still taking narcotics/opiates (such as Norco, Percocet, Vicodin, Hydrocodone, and Oxycodone)

When to continue/restart home medications:

Unless otherwise directed, you may continue your home medications as you normally would take them after surgery and you may restart any blood thinner medications the evening after your surgery.

When to call Dr. Minhas' office:

Please call Dr. Minhas' office if experiencing any of the following:

- Progressive loss of feeling of your hand and fingers which do not improve with elevation or loosening of your ACE wrap bandage or dressings.
- Substantially increasing pain over time which does not improve with elevation or loosening of your ACE wrap bandage or dressings
- Excessive bleeding, such as bright red blood which is saturating through your dressing.
- While a fever, nausea, and fatigue are not uncommon right after anesthesia and surgery, if these symptoms continue to last for more than 24-48 hours after surgery, please call Dr. Minhas' office.
- Any other urgent inquiries and/or concerns

Additional comments or instructions: _____

