

Postoperative Instructions for Distal Radius Fracture

Immediately After Surgery

You will be placed in a short splint immediately after surgery. You should wear this splint until you first post-operative appointment with Dr. Pitcher which should be scheduled 10-14 days after surgery. You should keep the splint clean and dry. You are encouraged to use your fingers for light activities as much as possible immediately after surgery to prevent stiffness. You should open and close your hands multiple times daily.

Bruising and swelling which can extend down the fingers is expected after distal radius surgery. Keeping the fingers and arm elevated as much as possible for the first 3-5 days after surgery will help control swelling. Ice packs can be used as well, but be sure to wrap them in a towel to prevent them from getting the splint wet. Bruising can take up to three weeks to resolve.

It is common to have numbness and tingling in the fingers due to local anesthetic medications given at the time of surgery. This can last from several hours to up to two days following surgery.

First Postoperative Appointment (10-14 days after surgery)

Your splint will be removed at your first post-operative appointment and new x-rays will be taken. Sutures will be removed if necessary at this visit. You will be provided with a removable splint. This splint should be worn when doing any outside activities, but should be removed for range of motion and for lighter activities such as typing and holding a cell phone. You should avoid lifting anything heavier than a cell phone or cup of coffee until 6 weeks after surgery.

It is important to keep your incision clean and dry. Over-use of creams and lotions can cause wound issues. It is ok to shower and get your incision wet unless instructed otherwise. The incision should be well dried before it is covered or before you put your splint on.

Pain Control

Place an ice pack in a plastic bag wrapped in a light towel and place over the splint. This can be done as much or little as desired. Many patients find that this significantly reduces pain and swelling.

You may have received a prescription for Norco (hydrocodone) or Percocet (oxycodone). One or two tablets can be taken every 4 hours as needed for pain. Anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen (Advil) or naproxen (Aleve) are often adequate to control pain after surgery. These can be combined with Norco or Percocet as needed.

Therapy

Set up hand therapy to begin 1-2 days after your first appointment with Dr. Pitcher unless instructed otherwise

Rehab Protocol:

Phase 1 (week 0-2): wear splint at all times. Work on finger exercises to prevent stiffness

Phase 2 (week 2-6): Transition to removable splint. Work on range of motion of wrist and fingers.

Splint should be removed multiple times daily for motion activities, and can be removed when at home or for light office work. No lifting any objects heavier than a cell phone or coffee cup.

Phase 3 (week 6-12): Wean from splint entirely. Begin strengthening exercises. *Gradually* return to all activities as comfort allows including athletic activities.

Driving

You can begin driving as soon as you feel safe and are completely in control of your vehicle. Do not drive if you are taking narcotics or under the influence in any way.

Call Dr. Pitcher at (925) 556-7344 if you experience any of the following issues

- You have severe pain stretching your fingers or severe pain and tightness in your forearm muscles when making a gentle fist or when stretching your fingers. Some pain at the surgical site is expected.
- You develop a fever greater than 101°F for more than a couple of hours at any point after surgery
- There is pus or a foul odor around your incision, or if you are concerned you may be developing an infection
- You develop severe swelling above or below your splint. Some swelling is to be expected.

If you are unable to reach our clinic at the above number, you may need to go to the emergency room for evaluation.