

Discharge Instructions: Elbow Surgery

General Care

It is important to **follow your orthopedic surgeon's instructions carefully** after you return home. We recommend having a responsible adult stay with you and check on you the evening following surgery.

Swelling

Swelling is expected but can be minimized with elevation.

- **Keep your hand and arm elevated above heart level as much as possible**, especially for the first 3–5 days after surgery.
- Use pillows to support your arm when sitting or lying down.
- Elevation helps reduce **pain, swelling, and the risk of complications**.

Dressing Care

- You will go home with a **post-operative dressing** over your elbow.
- **Do not remove or disturb the dressing** unless instructed by your care team.
- Keep the dressing **clean and completely dry** until your follow-up appointment.

If your fingers are visible outside the dressing or splint, check them regularly. They should remain **pink and warm**, not pale, blue, or numb.

Bearing Weight

- **Do not lift, carry, or push anything** with your operative arm.
- Avoid any resistance or active use of the elbow until cleared by your surgeon.
- Use a sling if instructed, but **take breaks from it several times daily** to gently move your fingers and wrist.

Bathing / Showering

- **Do not get your dressing or splint wet.**
- Use a waterproof sleeve or bag to protect the dressing if you must shower.
- Consider sponge bathing until your follow-up visit if dressing protection is not feasible.

Driving

Do not drive if:

- You have a **splint, sling, or functional impairment** of the operative arm
- You are **taking narcotic pain medication**

Driving can usually resume once you are **off pain meds, have full control of your arm, and can operate the vehicle safely**.

Medications

You may be prescribed a **narcotic pain medication** for short-term use after surgery.

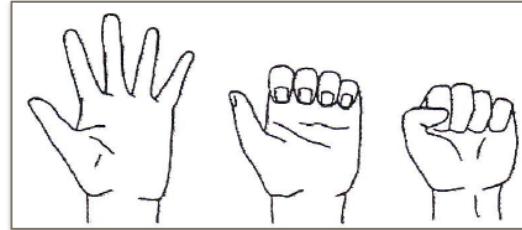
- Take it **only as directed and only when needed for pain**.
- Narcotic medications can cause **constipation**. Drink water and eat a high-fiber diet.
- **Do not drive, operate machinery, or drink alcohol** while taking these medications.

You may also be advised to take over-the-counter medications (e.g., acetaminophen, ibuprofen) for pain once your narcotic use decreases. Follow your surgeon's instructions.

Exercise Guide

To prevent stiffness and maintain circulation:

- At least **3–4 times per day**, gently **bend your fingers to make a fist**, then fully **straighten them**.
- If instructed, you may also **move your wrist gently**.
- **Do not actively move your elbow** unless cleared by your surgeon or physical therapist.



Warning Signs – Call Your Surgeon If You Notice:

- Fever **over 101.5°F**
- Chills
- Redness or warmth around the incision
- **Persistent or worsening pain**
- Excessive or unusual bleeding (a small amount of drainage is normal)
- **Numbness or tingling** in the hand or fingers

Emergency Warning Signs

Go to the **emergency room immediately** if you experience:

- **Chest pain**
- **Shortness of breath**

These could be signs of a **life-threatening condition** such as a blood clot.

Follow-Up Appointment

You should have a follow-up appointment with **Dr. Grutter 10–14 days after surgery**.

If this has not been scheduled, please **call the office as soon as you get home** to set one up.