

Discharge Instructions: Hand Surgery

General Care

It is important to follow your orthopedic surgeon's instructions carefully after surgery.

We recommend having a **responsible adult stay with you the evening after surgery** to assist and monitor your recovery.

Swelling

Swelling is common after hand surgery but can be significantly reduced with proper elevation.

- **Keep your hand and forearm elevated above heart level** as much as possible during the first 5–7 days.
- Use pillows or a sling when sitting or lying down to maintain elevation.
- The more your hand is elevated, the **less pain and swelling** you will experience.

Elevation is the **single most effective way** to reduce post-operative swelling and discomfort.

Dressing Care

- You will leave the hospital with a **dressing covering your hand** and possibly part of your forearm.
- **Do not remove or disturb the dressing** unless specifically instructed.
- **Keep the dressing clean and completely dry** at all times.

If your fingers are visible, monitor them for warmth and color. They should remain **pink and warm**, not pale, cold, or blue.

Bearing Weight

- **Do not lift, carry, or push anything** with your operated hand.
- Avoid gripping, squeezing, or using the hand for any activities until cleared by your surgeon.
- Use your non-operative hand for daily activities.

Bathing / Showering

- **Do not get the dressing wet.**
- Use a **waterproof covering or plastic bag** when showering, or sponge bathe to keep the area dry.
- **No soaking, swimming, or submersion** of the hand until cleared by your surgeon.

Driving

You may not drive if:

- You are **wearing a splint, cast, or bulky dressing** on either hand.
- You are taking **narcotic pain medications**.
- You are physically unable to control the steering wheel safely.

Driving may resume when you are **pain-free, have full control of the vehicle**, and are **no longer taking narcotics**—typically after your follow-up visit.

Medications

You may be prescribed a **narcotic pain medication** to help with post-operative pain.

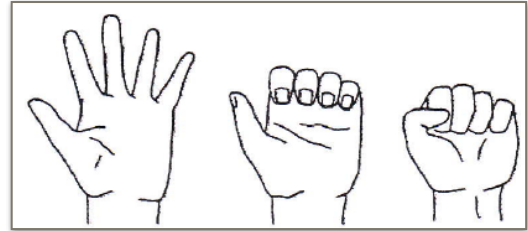
- Take only as directed, and **only when needed for pain**.

- Narcotics can cause **constipation**—drink water and eat a **high-fiber diet** while taking them.
- **Do not drive, operate machinery, or drink alcohol** while taking narcotic medications.
- You may transition to acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen as advised.

Exercise Guide

To prevent stiffness and promote circulation:

- **3–4 times per day**, gently **bend your fingers into a fist**, then fully **straighten them**.
- You may also gently **move your elbow and wrist**, unless instructed otherwise.
- **Do not perform any resistance or gripping exercises** unless directed by your surgeon or therapist.



If instructed, **occupational therapy** may begin after your first follow-up visit to guide your recovery.

Warning Signs – Call Your Surgeon If You Experience:

- Fever **above 101.5° F**
- Chills
- Redness or warmth around the incision or dressing
- Persistent or increasing pain
- Excessive swelling
- **Numbness or tingling** in the fingers or hand
- Unusual or foul-smelling drainage (some clear or blood-tinged drainage is normal early on)

Emergency Warning Signs

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

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

These may be signs of a **life-threatening blood clot or pulmonary embolism**.

Follow-Up Appointment

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

If it was not scheduled prior to discharge, **call the office when you get home** to arrange an appointment.