

Discharge Instructions: Shoulder Surgery

Cryotherapy (Icing)

Cold therapy significantly reduces pain, improves sleep, and decreases the need for pain medication—especially important after shoulder surgery.

- Ice the shoulder for **20–30 minutes each hour**, especially during the **first 48 hours**.
- You may use a **bag of ice**, gel pack, or **cold therapy machine**. Follow the device instructions if you received one.
- Always **place a cloth or T-shirt between the ice and your skin** to prevent frostbite.

Important: Inspect the skin every **10 minutes** while icing. Stop using cold therapy if you experience:

- Burning
- Blisters
- Increased pain
- Skin discoloration or welts

Dressing & Incision Care

- You will go home with a dressing over your shoulder.
- You may **remove the dressing 72 hours after surgery** unless instructed otherwise.
- Underneath, you may see **steri-strips (small adhesive tapes)** over the incisions — **do not remove these**.
- After dressing removal:
 - Cover incisions with clean **Band-Aids**
 - **Keep the area clean and dry**
- The steri-strips will begin to peel off over time and can be trimmed. Let them fall off on their own.

Sling or Shoulder Brace Use

- Your arm has been placed in a **sling or brace** for comfort and protection.
- Wear it **at all times when out of the house or around others**.
- You may **remove it at home briefly** to write, type, or eat — but avoid **arm movement** beyond the elbow unless instructed.
- **Do not lift anything heavier than a pencil or remote** for the first **6 weeks**, or as instructed by your surgeon.

Bathing / Showering

- Keep incisions **completely dry for the first 5 days** after surgery.
- If incisions are dry and intact on day 5, you may **shower**, but:
 - Avoid direct water hitting the shoulder
 - Pat the area dry with a clean towel
- **Do not soak** in a bath, hot tub, or pool until cleared by your surgeon.

Driving

Do **not drive** if:

- You are wearing a sling or brace
- You cannot safely control the steering wheel
- You are taking **narcotic pain medication**

Driving usually resumes only after **sling removal** around 4-6 weeks and when you are **pain-free and off narcotics**.

Medications

- You may be prescribed a **narcotic pain medication** for short-term relief.
- Take only as needed and **follow the instructions exactly**.
- Narcotics may cause **constipation** — drink plenty of water and eat a **high-fiber diet**.
- **Do not drive, drink alcohol, or operate machinery** while on narcotics.

You may transition to **acetaminophen or NSAIDs** as directed for ongoing pain control.

Activity & Safety

- **Avoid lifting, pushing, or pulling** with the operative arm.
- **Do not run, bike, or engage in lower body exercise** until cleared.
- Workspaces and homes should be cleared of tripping hazards. **Avoid falling at all costs.**

Warning Signs – Call Your Surgeon If You Experience:

- Fever **over 101.5°F**
- Chills
- Redness, warmth, or unusual drainage from the incision
- Persistent or increasing shoulder pain
- Significant swelling
- **Numbness or tingling** in your arm or hand

Emergency – Call 911 or Go to the ER If You Experience:

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

These may indicate a **blood clot or pulmonary embolism**, which is a life-threatening condition.

Follow-Up Appointment

You should see your **surgeon 14 days after surgery** for your first post-operative visit.

- **Physical therapy** may begin as early as **7 days after surgery**, but in many cases it is **not started until after your 14 day follow-up** appointment.
- Your surgeon will determine the appropriate timing based on your procedure and healing progress.

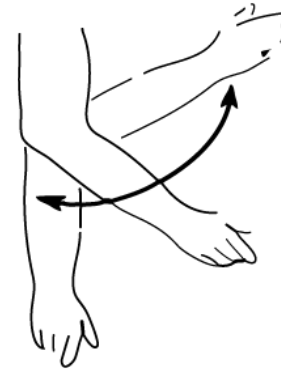
Home Exercise Program

To maintain circulation and joint mobility, perform these gentle range of motion exercises **3–4 times per day**:

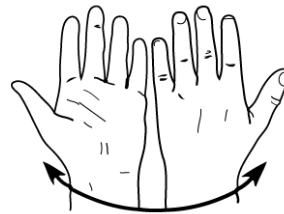
- **Wrist circles and flexion/extension**
- **Finger flexing and straightening**
- **Elbow bending and straightening (with the arm at your side)**

These exercises should be **pain-free** and performed **slowly with no weight**. Do not attempt shoulder movement unless specifically instructed by your surgeon or therapist.

1-Elbow ROM: Begin with arm at side. Gently bend and straighten your elbow as far as possible. Repeat slowly 10 times 3-4 times at day. Do not use any weight and go slowly.



2-Wrist Rotation: Start with palm facing up and gently rotate palm down. Repeat slowly 10 times 3-4 times at day. Do not use any weight and go slowly.



3-Wrist Flexion: Bend wrist from side to side and up and down. Repeat slowly 10 times 3-4 times at day. Do not use any weight and go slowly.



4-Finger ROM: Bend fingers to make a fist and then straighten fingers. Repeat slowly 10 times 3-4 times at day. Do not use any weight and go slowly.

