

**Lakshmanan (Lucky)  
Sivasundaram, MD**  
Orthopedic Sports Medicine, Shoulder,  
Hip, and Knee Surgery  
P. 760.552.8585 F. 760.243.4276



## **Distal Radius Fracture Postoperative Instructions**

### **Dressing**

You have a short arm splint. Do NOT remove dressing until next appointment with Dr. Sivasundaram. Please call Dr. Sivasundaram's office if an appointment is not already arranged. If you experience persistent numbness, tingling or burning sensation in your hand, it may be due to a cast or surgical dressing that is too tight. Keep your hand elevated, and if this does not resolve the problem, call your doctor immediately.

### **Activity**

If pain will allow, try to flex and extend the fingers on the operated hand. The dressing and swelling may cause the fingers to be stiff and this is common. If the fingers turn blue, purple, or remain numb after the block has worn off, call the office immediately.

### **Showering**

You may shower as soon as you want after surgery. Please cover the splint with a bag.

### **Ice & Elevate**

The use of ice after surgery will help with both pain control and swelling. Continue with icing for the first 48 hours after surgery. It can take a while for the coolness of the ice to get through the splint/cast, but be patient, it will work. Thereafter, use it on an as needed basis.

Elevate your hand above your heart level as much as possible for the first 48 hours, even while walking. This will keep the swelling to a minimum and prevent throbbing and pain. Elevation reduces swelling and minimizes pain. Less swelling is associated with a lower infection rate, fewer wound complications, less post-operative stiffness, and more rapid recovery of function. To keep the swelling down, your hand must be kept above the level of your heart.

One common mistake people make is they will put pillows or blankets under their elbow while sitting or laying down. Please always keep the hand above the elbow and move your fingers as much as possible! Swelling tends to collect in the lowest part of the body so if your hand is below the rest of your arm, your fingers and hand will swell and become stiff.

### **Pain Medication**

If you received a *regional anesthetic block* your arm and hand may be numb for several hours (6-24 hours). You will be discharged from the surgery center to home with an oral pain medication

(analgesic). Rest and elevation is still one of the most important factors for pain control. Take your pain medication as directed even though the pain is minimal with the block; do not wait for the pain to become out of control. The most severe pain occurs as the block wears off. Even if you are not having pain but feel the arm and hand “waking up”, take your pain medication so that it will be working when needed.

Have any prescriptions filled as soon as possible and begin taking your medication as directed. Do not change the dosage of your medication unless you have checked with your doctor. DO NOT drink alcoholic beverages or smoke while taking your pain medications. DO NOT drive a car or other vehicle or operate any machinery while under the influence of your medication.

It is important NOT TO WAIT until your pain is severe before taking your medication since the medications often take an hour or longer before you will begin to feel some relief. Take the medication as soon as you experience even mild pain the first night after surgery. Usually by the second or third day after surgery your upper extremity will begin to feel better and you will require much less pain medication.

**\*\*Prescription refills will only be addressed during normal business hours. Narcotic refills will not be addressed after hours or on weekends\*\***

*Side Effects:* All pain medications can cause nausea, vomiting, and/or constipation. It is best to take pain medication with food. If these problems become significant, please contact our office. Have a phone number for your pharmacy available.

Rest and elevation of the operative upper extremity are important factors in pain control.

### **Diet**

Gradually resume your normal diet. The night of your surgery, begin with liquids and/or light foods. If you are feeling well enough in the morning, progress to your normal eating patterns. Eating a well balanced diet with *plenty* of fresh fruits and vegetables and *drinking plenty of fluids* may help alleviate any constipation resulting from pain medication.

### **Driving**

It is not advisable to drive a vehicle while you are on pain medication, due to the possible side effects. However, once you are off pain medication and you feel that you are able to safely control the vehicle, you may drive.

### **Warning Signs**

**Fever:** A low-grade fever (less than 101 degrees) following surgery and lasting for several days is quite common. You may even have some slight chills and sweating. If you have a low-grade fever you should make an effort to cough and breathe deeply to clear congestion from your lungs.

After discharge, call your physician if you experience:

A temperature over 101 degrees (38.6 C)

Increasing pain (despite adequate elevation and maximal oral pain medication)

Increasing or foul smelling drainage (after the first 24 hours)

If any of the above occurs, please notify Dr. Sivasundaram’s office.

### **Follow-up Appointments**

We are interested in your prompt and complete recovery from surgery. If you have any problems or questions concerning your recovery, please call your doctor's office. Your doctor's office can be called Monday --Friday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm.

You should already have an appointment to see Dr. Sivasundaram within the next few weeks. If you do not have this appointment, or need to change your appointment time, please contact our office.

Dr. Sivasundaram's office numbers are:

- 1) During normal business hours, 8:30AM to 5PM Monday through Friday, please call: (760) 552-8585. This is our office number.
- 2) For post-operative issues, you may also reach out to Alex, our surgical care coordinator: (760) 912-0037.
- 3) If you cannot reach anyone at the above numbers, but you have an emergency, please seek evaluation at urgent care or the emergency room.

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

Patients often have similar questions after surgery. To help reduce unnecessary worry and stress after your surgery, we have answered some of your commonly asked questions.

#### **What should I do if I see blood on my bandages?**

Many patients bleed through their bandages after surgery. Do not let this alarm you. Please do not remove the initial bandage since this it is sterile and we want to maintain cleanliness around the wound until we change the dressing.

#### **When can I shower or bathe?**

Often we will keep a snug compression bandage on your foot for several weeks after surgery. You should not get this bandage wet. If the bandage should become wet, it will need to be changed. Keep your arm dry until the bandage is removed for good. Therefore, sponge baths are the recommended body cleansing method. Information regarding shower cast protectors is available at your surgeon's office. Glad brand Press'n Seal is also a good, lower cost option for keeping your dressing dry while bathing.

#### **What should I do if the bandages come off?**

The bandages are placed in a very specific fashion. If the bandages are removed or come off, please place a sterile gauze wrap over the incisions. We should see you in the office the following day to replace your bandage.

#### **When will the numbness that I feel in my hand wear off?**

We usually numb your arm during surgery. Sometimes it takes up to 24 hours for the numbness to go away. You may continue to have some numbness in your fingers after this time because the nerves can be slightly bruised during surgery.

#### **What do I do about swelling around my fingers and behind my bandage?**

All patients have a significant amount of swelling around their bandage and hand after surgery. This swelling will last for several months. After surgery you should elevate your hand higher than your heart to decrease swelling. This is particularly critical for several days after surgery while your incision is healing. Increased swelling puts increased pressure on the edge of your incision and may cause it to split slightly. Once the wound is healed, the swelling will not harm your surgery. If you are concerned about a significant amount of swelling or redness, please call for an appointment. *You should also try to move your free fingers (not those in the dressing) as much as possible to avoid stiffness and swelling.*

**How can I tell if an infection is developing in my upper extremity?**

Many patients will have a slight drainage of yellowish fluid for 1 to 2 weeks after surgery. This does not mean that your hand/arm is infected. Severe wound infections usually occur from 5 to 10 days after surgery. If you notice extreme swelling, increased pain, or extreme redness, please contact us immediately. Usually if we treat an infection early with antibiotics, future surgery can be avoided.

**What should I do if I experience nausea or vomiting due to the pain medications I am taking?**

Many patients have nausea after surgery when taking pain medications. If the nausea and vomiting are severe, we will need to prescribe medication in an oral dissolving or suppository form.

**When will the stitches be removed?**

We usually remove the stitches at approximately 1 to 2 weeks after surgery. If you miss your appointment because of an emergency, do not be alarmed because the stitches can remain in place for many weeks without causing harm.

**My arm itches under the cast/splint, is there anything I can do?**

Whatever you do, do **NOT** stick any objects under your dressing to scratch your arm! I have seen pen caps and other objects get stuck under the cast and the patient is too embarrassed to come in, so we discover the pen cap or other items under the cast a few weeks later and it has dug into the skin making an ulcer/wound in the patient's skin. Using ice packs on your arm (the cold takes a long time to penetrate the thick dressing) or a hair dryer set to the cool setting to blow cool air down the splint/cast to help alleviate itching.