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Discharge Instructions for Patients After Carpal Tunnel Surgery

Success of the Surgery

Your pre-operative symptoms may take weeks or months to improve fully. Many people report improvement in their hand numbness in the first few weeks, although it may take longer. The incision will be at least slightly tender for months after the surgery.

Care of Your Incision

Your incision was closed with stitches. You can shower after the surgery but you should cover your bandage with a plastic bag. Keep your dressing clean and dry. After three days you may remove it and change it if you wish. Otherwise you can keep it on until your suture removal appointment 10-14 days after your surgery. Keep your hand elevated above your heart level for about two days, and avoid lifting anything heavier than a half-gallon of milk. Bruising and finger swelling is common, but if you have severe pain, any problem moving your fingers, or fever, you should call the office. After the sutures are removed, you can soak the hand and start gentle scar massage with vitamin E oil or lotion.

Pain Management

A post-operative pain medication plan will be discussed in the office. Many patients may only need an NSAID medication such as ibuprofen (Motrin) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) after this surgery. If you are given a small prescription of narcotic pain medication after the surgery, it's fine to use an NSAID such as ibuprofen, or Tylenol along with the narcotic, or instead of it.

As your pain decreases, you should gradually decrease the narcotic medication. No refills of narcotic medications are given for small surgeries.

Activity

You should avoid lifting anything heavier than a half-gallon of milk for the first two weeks. After that, you can start to lift objects if you are comfortable. Light typing, using your fingers to button and unbutton clothes, etc., are tolerated by most patients. Most people can return to work 2-3 weeks after the surgery.

Therapy

For many patients, working with an occupational therapist after the surgery can help with the recovery process. This will be discussed at your first post-operative appointment.

Diet and Medication

You can resume your regular diet and most regular medications, including aspirin, immediately after the surgery. When to restart prescription blood thinners will be discussed before the procedure.

Follow-Up Appointments

Your suture removal follow-up appointment should have been set up at the time of your pre-operative visit, and is usually 10-14 days after the surgery.

What to Watch For

The following symptoms may indicate a problem. You should call the office number listed below.

- Fever higher than 101°F
- Uncontrollable hand pain
- Inability to move the fingers
- Redness or drainage from the incision

For questions after the surgery, please call 401-606-6360. If you feel you have an urgent problem outside of office hours, go to the nearest Emergency Department.



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