

Instructions after Hand Surgery

We want you to recover from your hand surgery as quickly as possible. Take things quietly for a couple of days, and avoid using the hand that was operated on. Investing some time at the start of your recovery means that things get back to normal as quickly as possible. Following these instructions in the days after your surgery will help.

Bandages and splints

Bandages and splints have been applied after your surgery to keep your wound clean and protect any structures that have been repaired. Please do not remove your dressing unless you have been specifically instructed to do so.

The bandages should feel comfortably firm. If they are uncomfortably tight or your fingers look blue please loosen and reapply the outer layer. Please contact Dr Kotronakis or the hospital if this does not help.

Plaster or fibre glass splints will help protect the site of your surgery. You can gently wiggle fingers that are immobilised by the splint. Other fingers, your elbow, shoulder and neck should be regularly stretched and moved to avoid stiffness.

Your dressings should be kept clean and dry, to help avoid infection. Please avoid working in a dirty environment. You can shower by putting your forearm in a plastic bag and tightly sealing the end with elastic bands or tape above your dressings.

Elevation

Keeping your hand elevated is very important, especially for the first 48 hours after your operation. This will help avoid pain, and decrease swelling. Swelling can slow your progress once you start exercises and movement,

Try to keep your hand elevated above the level of your heart. You can do this by holding your hand over the opposite shoulder, or resting on a stack of pillows when sitting or in bed.

If you prefer to use a sling make sure that your hand is tucked high, and that you regularly stretch your neck, shoulder and elbow.

Pain relief

Most patients are given a long lasting local anaesthetic at the end of their operation. This can result in numbness that lasts up to a day. You are likely to need some pain relief after the local anaesthetic wears off. Resting and elevating your hand should help.

We want you to be as comfortable as possible, and you should not just put up with significant pain. Please use any pain killers that were prescribed after the operation. Over the counter medications that are usually effective are regular paracetamol and an anti-inflammatory, as long as these medications do not disagree with you.

You should realise that mild pain is not unexpected, and this will ease over a couple of days, allowing you to decrease the medications you use.

Signs to watch out for

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The recovery after hand surgery is usually smooth. Occasionally problems arise, and there are some warning signs to look out for.

- Severe pain that is not controlled by your pain killer or loosening the outer layer of your bandages.
- Purple or blue congested fingers
- Continuous bleeding through your bandages. Some staining or bleeding is not unusual. This can usually be stopped by elevating your hand to the level of your head for a few minutes.
- Feeling unwell, fever of 38 or higher, redness spreading up your arm or a foul smell developing after a couple of days can be a sign of an infection.
- Sudden loss of movement in a finger after you have had a tendon repair

We want to help if any of these problems develop. Please contact the office on 9588 2494, or the hospital where you had your operation.