

Hand Surgery

Post operative instructions

Before your operation

- Organise for a responsible adult to accompany you home after your operation and stay with you for the full 24 hours after your surgery.
- The time off work will vary depending on the nature of your job. Medical Certificates can be provided when you are discharged and at your clinic visits.

What to expect immediately after surgery

You can expect slight bleeding, mild pain and discomfort for a few days with mild swelling and bruising which may last for up to 2 weeks.

Everyone recovers from their anaesthetic differently; but post-operative nausea is a common side effect following general anaesthesia. If you are experiencing nausea we recommend eating light, small meals throughout the day. If nausea or vomiting is severe, please contact us.

What to expect the first week post surgery

Constipation: Constipation is common following a general anaesthetic. To avoid constipation, ensure you drink plenty of fluids and foods containing fibre. If necessary, we recommend a gentle laxative drink such as Movicol. This can be purchased from your chemist.

Pain relief: The majority of patients will experience mild pain following surgery. Pain should be manageable and will slowly ease over the course of your recovery. Your anaesthetist may provide you with pain medication, to be taken as directed. If you have not been given a prescription, we recommend the use of Panadol or Panadol extra to manage any discomfort.

Do not take aspirin for at least 10 days following surgery as this can increase the risk of bleeding. If your pain is severe and does not subside with pain medication, please contact us

Positioning and Elevation: Rest and elevation of the operated area is very important and will also help reduce discomfort. If fitted with a sling, take your arm out of the sling once an hour to exercise your shoulder and elbow so they do not become stiff. If your fingers and thumb are not in the splint, they should be moved as well. At night sleep with your arm propped up on pillows next to you.

Driving: You are not to drive or operate machinery for 24 hours post surgery. You can drive when your wound and/or pain medication no longer impedes your functionality.

Dressings: You may shower or bathe the day following your operation but must ensure the dressings and plaster cast stay dry and in place until your first post operative appointment, when showering, put a plastic bag over the dressing and secure it with tape. Do not adapt or tamper with your dressings. We will instruct you further about dressings, washing and caring for any wounds when you attend for your first post operative review.

Exercise: Avoid bending and straining for the first week following surgery and do not attempt to lift anything with the affected hand.

In addition to aggravating swelling, these activities may elevate blood pressure and start bleeding.

Removal of sutures: We will normally remove sutures at your first post operative review. If absorbable sutures have been used, removal will not be necessary.

Recovery after the first week

Exercise: After approximately 2 weeks you may be able to resume light exercise and household duties such as cleaning, caution should be taken when attempting strenuous lifting. Vigorous exercise can usually be resumed after 4-6 weeks. You may require a supervised exercise program with a Hand Therapist, this can be for fitting of a hand splint, helping regain movement or reducing stiffness in the affected limb.

Scar Management: Hand surgery scars will generally be slightly red for a few months and then begin to fade. On your second post-operative visit you will be advised on the most effective scar management options to ensure you have the best possible outcome.

Alcohol: Alcohol can increase post-operative bleeding and can be dangerous in combination with your pain medication. Do not drink alcohol until you have finished taking all pain medication.

Smoking: We recommend you do not smoke for at least 3-4 weeks following your operation as smoking impedes blood flow to the skin and increases healing time.

Contact us if you develop:

- A fever or become unwell
- Nausea and vomiting which persists after 48 hours
- Spreading redness/rash over the operative area or suture lines
- Your fingers become blue, swollen or numb.
- Your cast becomes loose, cracked or wet.
- Pain which is not relieved or controlled by your pain-killers
- Have sudden copious discharge of fluid or oozing from your wounds
- For after hours emergencies or if you are unable to contact the office, visit your local GP or emergency room.