



Orthopedic Surgery • Sports Medicine
Neil Kumar, MD



Post-Operative Instructions – Elbow Fracture Fixation

Bandages & Ace Wrap:

Your post-operative dressing has three layers. First, your incisions were closed with stitches. Your sutures are removed about 2 weeks after surgery.

The second layer is a white fluffy dressing that is loosely wrapped around your elbow. Occasionally, there will also be a small amount of blood, which is nothing to worry about.

The third and final layer is a plaster splint covered with a long Ace wrap that was wrapped around your elbow from the hand up to your shoulder. The rigid plaster will protect your fracture repair. You must keep the splint clean and dry, and do NOT remove it.

We will keep the dressings and splint on for about 2 weeks. This gives your elbow enough time to reduce swelling, help with incision healing, and protect the fracture repair. Once your dressings are removed in the office, you do not have to wrap your elbow unless the skin is irritated by your clothes or shoes or if you will be in the sun for long periods of time. Your skin will be extra sensitive to the sun until fully healed so take extra precaution.

Ice, Elevation & Cryo-Cuff:

The best way to minimize swelling after surgery is with elevating the elbow, wrist, and hand. Keep the entire arm elevated on a couple of pillows. We follow the "one to four" rule - for every hour your elbow is down (like sitting in a chair or walking) it takes four hours to reverse the swelling.

Many patients will have a cryo-cuff placed between the fluffy wrap and Ace wrap to cool the elbow after surgery. (If you do not have one simply follow the same instructions using a bag of ice). Use the cryo-cuff for 20 to 30 minutes every 1-2 hours for the first 3 to 4 days. Also, use it after physical therapy or times of increased activity for the next several weeks.

Brace:

A splint is used to protect your elbow after surgery. The splint is to be worn at all times for the first 2 weeks following surgery. DO NOT lean on the splint. After your splint is removed, you will transition into an elbow brace. This brace will be used for approximately 2-6 weeks. Your therapist will give you instructions regarding weight-bearing, range of motion, and other exercises.

Washing & Bathing:

You will be seen in the office a few days after surgery. You may shower by wrapping plastic over the splint. Because the splint will be used for up to 2 weeks after surgery, it will be awhile before you can take a full shower, so be patient. Once your dressings are changed in the office and you begin using the elbow brace, you can shower without covering your elbow. You can use soap on your arm and over the Steri-Strips. This shower should be quick. Do not take a bath or use a swimming pool until 1 month after surgery. Because lake and ocean water contain bacteria, avoid these for 6 weeks after surgery.

The yellow discoloration you will find on your arm is a long lasting surgical prep called ChloroPrep. This is used because it will kill bacteria on your skin hours longer than old fashion iodine surgical preps. This yellow discoloration will not come off with soap and water, instead you will need rubbing alcohol to remove it.

Walking:

Your physical therapist will give you instructions regarding how to use your brace safely and weight-bearing restrictions. You will have weight-bearing restrictions for approximately 6 to 8 weeks, depending on the exact nature of the surgery.

Physical Therapy

Regular physical therapy will begin after 2 to 3 weeks, and you will start range of motion, swelling reduction techniques, and basic exercises on your first visit.

Follow up appointment:

I want to see my patients in the office 3 to 4 days after surgery. Sometimes I find other issues with your elbow that we did not anticipate. When these unforeseen circumstances occur, I may want to see you in the office sooner than originally planned.

Pain Medications:

I will usually prescribe multiple medications for the control of your post-operative pain. Please read the Surgical Pain Medicine Guide to help understand your post-surgical pain medications. During surgery, I will often inject a painkiller, like novocaine, that will give some pain relief for several hours after surgery. It is important to begin to take your pain pills before this medicine wears off.

Oxycodone is a strong narcotic pain medication. It will begin to work within 15 minutes after taking it with a maximal effect in one to two hours. Narcotic medications like Oxycodone can cause nausea or an episode of vomiting. Take the medicine with a little food, start with just one pill, and be patient while the medicine begins to work. Usually, after the first few doses, the nausea goes away. If you take a full dose of this medication for more than 4 or 5 days it can lead to constipation. Normally, Oxycodone is taken every 6 hours but if the pain is severe, it can be used every 4 hours. Remember, narcotic pain medications do have addiction potential with prolonged use.

DVT Prophylaxis – Prevention of Blood clot following surgery:

The risk of a leg blood clot following minor surgery is very rare. The majority of patients that suffer this complication usually have a prior history of a blood clot, a positive family history

of DVT, or other unusual risk factors. The medical literature is unclear what method of prevention is best and you will find that each surgeon does this a little different.

- Take one 81mg aspirin every day for 30 days
- Take one 325mg aspirin every day for 30 days
- Take one 325mg aspirin twice a day for 30 days

What to watch out for:

- Pain that is increasing every hour in spite of the pain medication
- Pain or swelling in your calf
- Fever greater than 101°
- Increasing pain with walking
- Unable to keep food or water down for more than one day

Who to Call for Questions and Problems:

If you are having problems or have questions, please call our office at 813-684-3707 (Brandon/Riverview office) or 813-633-0286 (Sun City office) and our nurse will help you. We realize the after surgery some problems or questions are urgent and can not wait until normal working hours. Under these circumstances please call 813-684-3707 anytime (24 hours a day, 7 days a week) and the doctor on-call or I will return your call. If you do not receive an answer within 20 minutes there may be a problem with the beeper so please call again. If an emergency were to occur you can always go straight to the emergency room for immediate attention.

Driving:

After elbow fracture fixation, your ability to drive will be delayed. You will be allowed to drive after meeting several criteria. First, you must be weight bearing as tolerated with the arm. This ensures that, in the case of an emergency, you can remove yourself from the car safely. Second, you are no longer using the elbow brace as part of your rehabilitation. Driving with the brace can be uncomfortable and dangerous. Third, you have stopped taking the narcotic pain medication. Fourth, you should not drive until the pain in the elbow has decreased to a tolerable level. *It is critical to protect the fixation for the first 12 weeks after surgery.* The first time you drive, test your skill in an empty parking lot with another passenger.