



**Sports Medicine Division Post-Operative Instructions**  
**Brad E. Brautigam MD**

**Post-Op Instructions Open Elbow Surgery**

Please note that these instructions are general guidelines to be followed; however, any written or verbal instructions provided by your provider supersede the instructions below and should be followed.

**DIET**

- Begin with clear liquids and light foods (jello, soups, etc.)
- Progress to your normal diet if you are not nauseated

**WOUND CARE**

- Maintain your operative dressing, loosen bandage if swelling of the hand occurs
- It is normal for the elbow to bleed and swell following surgery. If blood soaks through the bandage, do not become alarmed, reinforce with additional dressing
- To avoid infection, keep surgical incisions clean and dry – you may shower by placing a plastic covering over the surgical site beginning the day after surgery. NO immersion of the arm.
- Elbow will be immobilized in a splint/sling following surgery do not remove until post op appointment 7-14 days following surgery.
- You may begin showering and getting your wound site wet after your first post-op appointment.

**MEDICATIONS**

- Local anesthetics are injected into the wound and shoulder joint at the time of surgery. This will wear off within 8-12 hours and it is not uncommon for patients to encounter more pain on the first or second day after surgery when swelling peaks.
- Most patients will require some narcotic pain medication for a short period of time – this can be taken as per directions on the bottle.
- Common side effects of the pain medication are nausea, drowsiness, and constipation. To decrease the side effects, take the medication with food. If constipation occurs, consider taking an over the counter laxative.
- If you are having problems with nausea and vomiting, contact the office to possibly have your medications changed.
- Do not drive a car or operate machinery while taking the narcotic medication or while in sling
- If you are having pain that is not being controlled by the pain medication prescribed, you may take an over the counter anti-inflammatory medication such as ibuprofen or naproxen in between doses of pain medication. This will help to decrease pain and decrease the amount of narcotic medication required. Please take as directed on the bottle.
- Please take a baby aspirin (81 mg) **two times daily** for **14 days** to minimize the risk of blood clot formation. If you are already on a blood thinner (Coumadin, Xarelto, Eliquis, etc.) please restart this the following day after surgery instead of taking a baby aspirin. If you already take a baby aspirin you may resume this unless you have specific instructions from your provider.

**ACTIVITY**

- When sleeping or resting, inclined positions (i.e.: reclining chair) and a pillow under the forearm for support may provide better comfort.
- Do not engage in activities which increase pain/swelling. Unless otherwise instructed the arm should remain in the sling at all times.
- Avoid long periods of sitting or long distance traveling for 2 weeks.
- NO driving until instructed otherwise by physician
- May return to sedentary work ONLY or school 3-4 days after surgery, if pain is tolerable

**IMMOBILIZER (if prescribed)**

- You will be placed in a post mold splint where you cannot straighten your elbow for 1-2 weeks following surgery



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Brad E. Brautigan MD  
Ian J. Dempsey MD, MBA

- You are to wear sling at all times while the splint is in place

### ICE THERAPY

- Icing is very important in the initial post-operative period and should begin immediately after surgery.
- Use ice packs for 40 minutes every 2 hours daily until your first post-operative visit – remember to keep leg elevated to level of chest while icing. Care should be taken with icing to avoid frostbite to the skin.

### EXERCISE

- Begin finger flexion and extension on the first post-operative day to help decrease swelling.
- If formal physical therapy (PT) is needed, it is typically arranged prior to your surgery date. It generally begins several days after your surgery date unless your provider has stated otherwise. If you are unsure of this please call the office at 740-454-3273 to receive instructions for starting therapy.

### EMERGENCIES\*\*

- Contact our office M-F 8:00AM – 5:00PM at 740-454-3273
- Painful swelling or numbness (note that some swelling and numbness is normal)
- Unrelenting pain
- Fever (over 101° – it is normal to have a low-grade fever for the first day or two following surgery) or chills
- Redness around incisions
- Color change in distal arm and/or hand
- Continuous drainage or bleeding from incision (a small amount of drainage is expected)
- Difficulty breathing
- Excessive nausea/vomiting
- Calf pain
- If you have an emergency **after office hours** or on the weekend, contact our after-hours answering service at **740-454-3273** to reach an OAZ provider on call.
- If you have an emergency that requires immediate attention proceed to the nearest emergency room.

### FOLLOW-UP CARE/QUESTIONS

- If you do not already have a post-operative appointment scheduled, please contact our office at 740-454-3273 to schedule.
- Typically, the first post-operative appointment following surgery is 10-14 days following surgery
- If you have any further questions please contact us during office hours