

# Hand Surgery

## Your Surgery and Recovery at Home

Hand surgery is done for many reasons such as carpal tunnel, flexor tendon injuries, osteoarthritis, or broken bones.



### Going home checklist

- You have someone to drive you home.
- You have a responsible adult to stay with you for the first 24 hours, or if needed.
- You know what medicine(s) to take, as well as when and how to take them.
- You know what you cannot do for 24 hours (because of anesthetic) including:
  - × No driving or operating hazardous machinery
  - × No drinking alcohol or using any substance or street drug
  - × No making important decisions or signing legal documents

### Appointments after surgery

See your surgeon after surgery.

**My appointment is on:** \_\_\_\_\_

X-ray before your appointment  Yes  No

See your family practitioner\* \_\_\_\_\_ days after surgery.

**My appointment is on:** \_\_\_\_\_

\*Family practitioner refers to family doctor or nurse practitioner

You usually go home the same day or 1 day after the surgery. This will depend on your recovery and your health before the surgery.

## Caring for Yourself at Home

### Incision Care

The cuts through your skin (incisions) are covered with a bandage. Your hand or finger(s) might also have a splint.

**Always** wash your hands before and after touching around your incision.

You can take showers. While you have a bandage on, keep it dry by placing your arm in a plastic garbage bag. Tape the bag closed around your arm.

### Follow only the instructions checked off (☑):

- Do not** remove the bandage or splint.
- 2 days after surgery**, remove the bandage.
  - While showering, gently wash the incision. Pat dry.
  - If there are white tapes (steri-strips) on your incision, leave them in place.
  - You can cover the incision with a light bandage after your shower.

## Drinking and Eating

Return to your normal diet. You might feel sick to your stomach (nausea) or throw up (vomit). This should not last long. It is important to stay hydrated.

If you feel sick or throw up:

- Drink 'flat' ginger ale, clear soups, and clear fluids, and eat mild foods until you feel better. Other good choices include dry toast, crackers, popsicles, and gelatin dessert (such as Jell-O). Stay away from caffeine, carbonated soft drinks, and acidic fruit juices while feeling sick.
- Drink and eat small amounts often.
- Rest in bed until you feel better. Place a cool, damp cloth on your face and neck.
- Try not to smoke or be around smoking. It can make your nausea worse.

If you continue to feel sick, try taking a medicine to settle your stomach such as Gravol®. You can buy either pills to swallow or suppositories to put in your rectum (up the bum). Follow the directions on the package or ask your pharmacist.

You can get constipated if you are less active, eating less fibre, or taking opioid pain medication. To prevent constipation:

- Drink water throughout the day.
- Eat high fibre foods such as bran, prunes, whole grains, vegetables, and fruit.
- Walk and move around as much as you can.

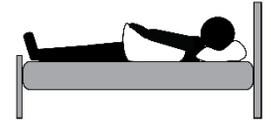
If you continue to be constipated, talk with a pharmacist or family practitioner about taking a laxative.

## Activity and Rest

It is normal for your hand or fingers to be swollen and hurt.

To help reduce the swelling and pain:

- Rest your hand and lower arm on pillows above the level of your heart as much as possible, especially for the first 2 days.
- Wiggle your fingers as much and as often as possible.
- Place an ice pack on the hand for 10 to 20 minutes, 4 to 5 times a day.



Balance your activity and rest for the first few days. Try to get 8 hours of sleep each day.

Your surgeon lets you know if you need to have physiotherapy and when to start it. Call and arrange for your therapy.

Usually you can return to driving 1 week after surgery, depending on the type of surgery you had. Ask your surgeon when it is safe for you to drive.

**Do not drive or drink alcohol** if you are taking an opioid medication.

## Managing pain

If you have been living with pain before surgery, be sure to tell your surgeon how you manage this pain, such as with medicines, herbs, supplements, cannabis products, other substances, massage, yoga, meditation, etc. This helps your surgeon create the best plan with you for managing pain after surgery.

Your surgeon gives you instructions to take pain medicine. This could include both prescription and non-prescription (over the counter) pain medicine. Follow the instructions given by your surgeon.

Your pain should be at a comfortable level that allows you to move, deep breathe, cough, and to do every day activities. Take your pain medicine regularly for the first day or so, even if you have just a little pain. Also do other things to help ease your pain or distract you from the pain, such as slow breathing, listening to music, watching T.V.

### Non-prescription pain medicines:

- acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
- non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)  
Examples: ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®)  
naproxen (Naprosyn, Aleve®)

**NSAIDs are not for everyone after surgery.** If you have (or have had) health problems such as stomach ulcers, kidney disease, or a heart condition, speak with your surgeon or family practitioner before using NSAIDs.

### Prescription pain medicines with opioids (narcotics):

- Tramacet® (tramadol and acetaminophen)
- Tylenol #3® (codeine and acetaminophen)
- Oxycocet® / Percocet® (oxycodone and acetaminophen)

**Note:** These medications also have 300 to 325mg acetaminophen in each tablet. All total, **do not** take more than 4000mg of acetaminophen in 24 hours (too much can harm your liver).

## Safe use of opioid pain medicines

If you are using any medicines that have opioids (narcotics) in them, take note of the following safety information.

- Tell your surgeon if you have sleep apnea. Opioids can make your sleep apnea worse.
- Your pain should lessen over the first week. You should not need to take opioid pain medicine for more than 1 week.
- Always use the least amount possible for the shortest amount of time.
- Common side effects include constipation, feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), a dry mouth, sweating, dizziness, and feeling drowsy.
- **Do not** crush, cut, break, chew, or dissolve opioids before taking. Doing this could cause serious harm, even death.
- While taking opioid pain medicines, **do not** drive, drink alcohol, or start taking any new sleeping pills.
- Store opioid medicines in a secure place. Keep out of sight and out of reach of children, teens, and pets.
- Never share your opioid medicine with anyone else.
- Take any unused opioid medicines back to your pharmacy to be safely disposed.  
**Do not** keep unused medicines at home.

Always read the label and/or information from the pharmacist about how to take medication safely.

**Questions about medications?** Speak to your local pharmacist. After-hours, call 8-1-1 and ask to speak to a pharmacist.

## When to get help

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### Call your surgeon or family practitioner

if you have any of these:

- increasing or new numbness and tingling in your hand or fingers that does not go away with loosening the bandage
- a fever over 38°C (101°F)
- a red and swollen incision that is hot to touch
- pus (yellow/green fluid) draining from or a bad smell coming from the incision
- continued bleeding from the incision
- pain does not ease with pain medicine, or stops you from moving or recovering

Can't contact your surgeon or family practitioner?  
Have any questions about your recovery?

- **Call Fraser Health Virtual Care**

10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., daily

**1-800-314-0999**

[fraserhealth.ca/virtualcare](http://fraserhealth.ca/virtualcare)

- **Call 8-1-1** (HealthLinkBC) to speak to a registered nurse any time - day or night.

HealthLinkBC is available in 130 languages.

For an interpreter, say your language in English. Wait until an interpreter comes on the phone.

- **Call 9-1-1** if you have any:

- trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- chest pain
- sudden severe pain

### Questions you might have:

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