

Elbow Surgery – Post-Operative Instructions

During the initial phase of healing (first 6–8 weeks), the shoulder must be protected. It is critical that you follow these instructions carefully to help avoid complications.

Precautions Until Cleared for Further Activity

- Keep the arm elevated when possible to help with swelling
- Take it easy: the more you are on your feet, the more swelling and pain you may experience.

Activity

- I will instruct you if you can start to work on elbow range of motion immediately or if you need to keep the elbow immobilized.
- Ok for wrist and hand range of motion.
- No lifting with operative extremity.

Diet

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

Postoperative Ice Use

- Ice is most useful in the first few days after surgery.
- Use ice packs for 20 minutes, four times daily.
- Continue using ice as long as it helps, usually for 3–4 days.
- Always place a towel or cloth between your dressing and the ice pack to avoid frostbite.

Anesthesia

- An anesthesiologist provides anesthesia and pain control during surgery.
 - Typically, a nerve block with sedation is used.
 - The nerve block usually lasts 12–14 hours, occasionally up to 24 hours.
 - Pain may return suddenly as the block wears off, often overnight.
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Pain Control and Medications

- Pain after surgery is normal. We will help you manage it.
- A combination of NSAIDs, Tylenol, and narcotics is often most effective.
- Opioids should be used only as needed and discontinued as soon as possible due to risks of dependence and side effects.

Common Medications:

- **Tylenol 500 mg**: 2 tablets every 8 hours as needed. Do not exceed 4,000 mg in 24 hours.
- **Ibuprofen 800 mg**: 1 tablet every 8 hours as needed. Avoid this if you have kidney disease, stomach ulcers, heart disease, or NSAID allergy.
- **Tramadol 50 mg or Oxycodone 5 mg** : 1 tablet every 6 hours as needed if pain is uncontrolled with other medications. Recommended for the first 24 hours, then taper as tolerated.
- **Zofran 4 mg**: Up to 3 times daily for nausea.
- **Prilosec 20 mg**: 1 capsule daily to prevent stomach irritation from NSAIDs.
- **Colace 100 mg**: 1 capsule twice daily as needed for constipation

Precautions:

- Do not drink alcohol, drive, or operate machinery while taking opioids.
- NSAIDs can increase the risk of stomach ulcers, heart attack, and stroke—avoid prolonged use without medical supervision.

Therapy

- Physical Therapy may be necessary on a case-to-case basis and will be determined at the first follow-up visit

Wound Care

- Please leave the surgical dressing in place until your first follow-up visit. If you need to change it, please use sterile gauze and tape, which can be purchased at any pharmacy.

- Some blood on the bandage is normal. If this happens, place a clean sterile dressing on top. If the bandage becomes soaked and you need to change it repeatedly, please call our office.
 - You may begin showering 72 hours (3 days) after surgery. Cover the incision with a waterproof bandage and avoid scrubbing the area. Do **not** take baths or fully submerge the incision in water. Many patients find sponge baths with a damp towel easier until the dressing is removed (usually 10–14 days after surgery).
 - Do not apply creams, lotions, or oils until incision is fully healed.
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Suture Removal

- Dissolvable sutures may be used. If not, sutures are removed at the first post-op visit (about 2 weeks).
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Sleeping

- Sleep with the arm elevated on a stack of pillows to minimize swelling.
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Return to Work

- Depends on your job type, modifications available, and your recovery.
 - Work status notes can be provided as needed.
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Return to Driving

You must meet ALL criteria before returning to driving:

- Off all opioid medications
- Walking normally
- Not in significant pain
- Able to use both hands on the wheel comfortably
- Out of your sling

Research shows that safe return to driving may take 6–12 weeks. Start with short, safe practice drives.

When to Contact the Office Immediately

- Excessive drainage/bleeding from incision after 48 hours
- Redness, swelling, or foul odor from incision
- Fever >101.4°F after 48 hours
- Severe uncontrolled pain

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Shoulder and Elbow Surgery

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- Persistent nausea/vomiting with medications
 - **Shortness of breath or chest pain (go to ER immediately and contact office)**
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Contact Information

- Call 646-665-6784 to contact our office.
 - After hours, you may be routed to the call center and the on-call physician.
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Please follow all instructions carefully. Proper post-operative care is essential for a safe recovery.