

Patient Education

Bone and Joint Center



Shoulder and Elbow Surgery

Understanding your treatment plan

Follow-up Visit:
Bone and Joint Center
Date: _____
Time: _____

Call Your Doctor If You Have:

- Fever greater than 101 °F, sweating, or chills.
- Increased redness, warmth, or foul-smelling drainage from your surgical site.
- Continued nausea, vomiting, or itching.

Call 911 or go to the emergency room right away if you have difficulty breathing, hives, or excessive bleeding.

Pain Medications

Some discomfort is normal after surgery. Pain medications usually will not take all of the pain away, but will help reduce it to a tolerable level. Prescriptions will be filled and given to you before you leave.

- **Do not drive or operate machinery while you are taking narcotic pain medications, as they can make you drowsy.**
- Take your pain medications as prescribed.
- Your prescription should last until your next follow-up visit.
- Medication requests take 48 hours to fill.
- Narcotic pain medications may cause constipation, nausea, and itching.

Constipation

Drink plenty of water, eat foods high in fiber, and get up and walk around every few hours. We will also provide you with “stool softener” medication that decreases constipation.

Nausea

To decrease nausea, take pain medications with food. If you continue to have nausea and vomiting after several hours, please call our nurse, as we may have to change your medications.

Itching

If you suffer from itching, you may take Benadryl for relief. If the itching continues or you develop a rash, discontinue the pain medication and call the nurse to get your medication changed.

Swelling

It is normal to have some swelling after surgery, as well as drainage from your dressing.

Questions?

Call 206-598-4288

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help at any time.

Bone and Joint Center
Monday through Friday,
8 a.m. to 5 p.m.
206-598-4288

After 5 p.m. and on weekends and holidays:
Call the Emergency Department at 206-598-4000 or call the operator at 206-598-6190 and ask to page the orthopaedic resident on call.

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Elevate

When lying down, try to keep your arm elevated above your heart – to reduce pain and swelling. You can do this by resting it on several pillows. Sometimes sleeping in a recliner with pillows under the elbow is most comfortable.

Cryo/Cuff Shoulder Cold and Compression Dressing

Icing your shoulder also helps to reduce swelling. You continuously wear the Cryo/Cuff, and remove it when bathing. Recharge our water no more than once every hour. Check your skin often to make sure it is not getting too cold. You may have numbness after surgery and be unable to feel extreme cold.

Movement

It is OK to move and use your wrist and hand. This will also help reduce the swelling. In most cases you will be in a sling, and we encourage you to remove it frequently throughout the day, to bend and straighten your elbow. But be sure to wear it when up walking or when sleeping for protection.

The First Day After Surgery

This might be the toughest day from a pain standpoint, so stay ahead of it by taking your pain medications as soon as you feel it begin to ache.

Activity

Get up and walk around several times a day. This will help you heal faster. It also helps prevent blood clots and constipation. Take your arm out of the sling to range your elbow and do gentle circles with your shoulder after meals, or at least 3 times a day.

The Second Day to 2 Weeks After Surgery

- **Swelling** will reach its greatest point 1 to 2 days after surgery. After that, it should decrease. It can take up to 6 weeks for most of the swelling to decrease.
- **Pain** usually reaches its peak 1 or 2 days after surgery. After that, it should slowly decrease. If you use your arm too much, the pain may increase. Take that as a sign to rest more, but keep your elbow and wrist moving.
- **Dressings** should only be changed if they become soaked.
- **Sutures** will usually be absorbed by the body. If nylon sutures are used, they will be removed at your follow-up appointment, 7 to 14 days after surgery.