

Distal Radius Fracture Repair

Post-Operative Care Instructions

You had surgery to repair a large broken bone in your forearm, called the radius. During surgery, your doctor realigned the broken pieces and secured them with a small metal plate and screws to hold them in the correct position.

1. Dressing & Incision Care

- **Keep it Dry:** DO NOT remove the initial splint or surgical dressing. It must stay clean, dry, and intact until your first follow-up appointment.
- **Showering:** Cover the wound with a protective covering; such as cast or wound protector covering that you can buy at the local pharmacy or medical supply store.
- **Injection Site Care:**
 - If you received any injection(s) during your procedure, you may remove the Band-Aid(s) the following day. If injection(s) were on the contralateral extremity, band aid(s) may be removed, and you can resume normal washing and hygiene of that extremity.

2. Pain & Swelling Control

- **Elevation:** This is the most critical step for reducing pain and swelling. Keep your hand and wrist elevated above the level of your heart for the first 48–72 hours. Use pillows to prop your arm up while sleeping or sitting.
- **Ice:** You may ice the hand and fingers and forearm every 20 minutes every 2 hours while awake.
- **Medication:** Follow the OTC pain protocol, unless contraindicated.
 - If you were given a local anesthetic block, your arm may feel numb for 12–72 hours. Begin taking oral pain medication (Acetaminophen or Ibuprofen) as soon as you feel the tingling return.
 - You were not prescribed post operative oral antibiotics for this surgery and are not expected to need it.

3. Activity & Restrictions

- **Weight Bearing:** You are **strictly non-weight bearing** on the operative arm. Do not lift, push, pull, or carry anything heavier than a coffee cup.
- **DO NOT DRIVE** if taking narcotic pain medication, if gripping is unsafe or if the block is still in effect.
**** ONCE THE REGIONAL BLOCK IS NO LONGER IN EFFECT ****
- **Sling:** You should discontinue usage of the sling.
 - You may choose to use the sling while ambulating or while in crowded places.
- **Finger Movement:**
 - Begin **gentle finger motion**
 - Bend and straighten your finger several times each hour to prevent stiffness and reduce swelling.
- **Shoulder and Elbow:** Gently move your shoulder and elbow (if not splinted) to prevent "frozen shoulder" or joint stiffness.

4. Warning Signs

Contact the surgical office immediately or seek medical attention if you experience:

- Fever (over 101.5°F) or chills.
- Numbness or tingling in the fingers that were not present immediately after surgery.
- Fingers that look pale, or feel unusually cold.
- Pain that is not relieved by elevation and medication.
- Sudden shortness of breath or chest pain.

5. Wound & Scar Care

- **Sutures:** Your sutures will be removed in the office, usually during your first post-op visit in **10-14 days**.
- **Scar Care:** at about **21 days** post-operatively you may begin scar massage.

- Gently massage the scar with lotion (NOT silicone gel) for 5 minutes twice daily. This process may be continued for several weeks or months postoperatively, until satisfactory.
- Silicone gel or sheets may be applied AFTER the 5 minute scar massage sessions, if desired. Leave the silicone on for as many hours a day as possible. Usage of the silicone may also continue until satisfactory. This may be purchased over the counter at the local pharmacy.

6. Follow-Up Appointment

- **First follow-up visit:** usually **10–14 days** after surgery.
- If you do not have an appointment, do not remember the date or need to change the appointment date, please call the office.
- At your first follow-up, we will typically obtain new x-rays, remove your sutures, and transition you into a removable brace.
 - Bring any braces or splints that were made in office prior to your surgery for readjustments.
 - Occupational therapy orders will also be discussed at that time.