

Carpal Tunnel Release

Postoperative Care Instructions

About Your Surgery

You had surgery to relieve your carpal tunnel symptoms, a condition which causes compression of your median nerve. Carpal tunnel surgery is done to take the pressure off the main nerve in your wrist. The doctor releases the tight ligament that is squeezing the nerve, which creates more room for the nerve to move freely.

1. Dressing & Incision Care

- **Keep it dry:** Keep the surgical dressing **clean, dry, and intact** for the first **24–48 hours**.
 - Thereafter, you may remove the padded dressing but leave the yellow steri strips in place. You may cover the steristrips with a large band-aid if desired.
 - Change the band-aid at **LEAST once daily until your follow up visit.**
 - While sutures remain in:
 - **DO NOT soak or get the incision wet.**
 - **DO NOT apply any ointments, lotions, or creams to your incision.**
- **Showering and Hygiene:** Keep your incision completely dry. Cover your arm with a waterproof protector—such as a cast cover, a heavy-duty plastic bag, or a long glove—which can be purchased at most local pharmacies or medical supply stores.
- It is typical to see bruising and swelling of the fingers, hand and wrist. It is also typical to have stiffness not only the operated digit but of the whole hand and wrist. Additionally, you may feel numbness of the fingers, as a local anesthetic was used at the time of the procedure. The numbness should alleviate within the 24 hours after the surgery.
- **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:** Keep your hand elevated above heart level for 2–3 days.
- **Ice:** Ice over the band-aid for 15–20 minutes at a time, several times a day as needed for pain and swelling.
- **Medications:** Follow the OTC pain protocol (Acetaminophen and/or Ibuprofen), unless contraindicated.
 - You were not prescribed post operative oral antibiotics for this surgery and are not expected to need it.

3. Activity & Restrictions

- **DO NOT DRIVE** if taking narcotic pain medication or if gripping is unsafe.
 - If you are not taking narcotics, you may drive when comfortable.
- **Weight Bearing:** May perform light activities of daily living as tolerated; such as feeding, dressing/grooming, bathing/toileting, transferring/moving around, writing, and driving.
 - Avoid heavy lifting, tight gripping, and overly repetitive hand use.
- **Return to work:**
 - **Desk work:** usually in a few days or sooner if comfortable.
 - **Sports or Manual labor:** several weeks
- **Finger and Wrist Movement:** This helps to prevent stiffness and reduce swelling.
 - Begin with gentle finger and wrist motion — the same or next day.
 - Bend and straighten your finger several times each hour.
 - Flex and extend your wrist periodically throughout the day.
 - Stop if you feel sharp pain or pulling at the incision.

4. 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 post-operatively, 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.

5. 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.

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, please call the office.

7. Recovery Timeline

- **Comfortable finger and wrist motion:** 2–6 weeks
- **Full healing and scar softening:** 6–12 weeks
- Swelling will usually be the last symptom to resolve and may take weeks to months but should continue to improve with time.
- Most patients experience improvement with the severity and frequency of their symptoms of carpal tunnel and will not need formal occupational hand therapy; however, can be prescribed if needed. Please note that therapy will not help with faster nerve recovery.