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Post-Operative Instructions: Arthroscopic Elbow Surgery

Pain Medication:

Most of our patients are prescribed a short supply of an opioid narcotic pain medication to help ease their pain post-surgery. This medication, if prescribed, has been sent to your preferred pharmacy. The pain is usually the worst the first few days, and usually, by the 3rd day, the pain eases up significantly. It is very important that you only take the opioid pain medication prescribed to you as directed, and only if needed. Besides addiction, one of the side effects of opioid narcotic medications is constipation. We recommend that you take a stool softener when taking this medication. Should you not need to take the opioid pain medication, our recommended medication for pain relief is Tylenol. It is recommended that you consult with your Primary Care Physician prior to taking any medications to ensure the medications are safe for you to take.

Elevation and Ice:

It is EXTREMELY important to elevate the affected extremity above the level of the heart to reduce swelling and discomfort. You can furthermore ice over top of your surgical dressing for up to 20 minutes at a time, multiple times per day, although depending on your dressing, you may not feel the coldness. Let the area warm up before reapplication.

Surgical Dressing and Showering:

You may remove your surgical dressing and begin showering 48 hours after surgery. You will see a few areas that contain stitches once you remove your dressing. These are ok to briefly get wet while taking a quick shower. Once you are done showering, pat the wound dry (no scrubbing) and cover the stitches with a Band-Aid. Do not soak in a bathtub, hot tub, or pool until otherwise directed. It is important to keep the elbow dry at all other times. Minimize any sweating, including exercising or being outside in hot/humid weather. Sweating increases infection risk.

For showering, you should cover it with a waterproof bag when bathing to keep it dry. Secure the waterproof bag well to avoid leakage. As long as you can keep the dressings dry, you can shower whenever you want.

Nerve Block:

You may have received a nerve block with your surgery. If so, your arm may stay numb for up to 24 hours. Increased sensation (usually accompanied by pins/needles sensation) and movement of your affected arm are signs that the block is wearing off. You may also experience pain and discomfort of the arm as the nerve block wears off.

Nausea:

It is common to get nausea after surgery usually from the result of your anesthesia. Start with drinking fluids such as Ginger Ale, then if tolerated, progress with a light soup and simple foods such as bread. Then if tolerated, you can resume a normal diet. Prolonged use of narcotics can increase nausea symptoms.

Sling:

If you received a nerve block, you should have gone home with a sling. Wear your sling until the nerve block completely wears off. After the block wears off, the sling is optional.

First Post-Operative Appointment:

Your first post-operative appointment should be scheduled for 7-10 days after your surgery. Call our office to schedule your appointment if it hasn't already been scheduled.

Physical Therapy:

We will further discuss the details and scheduling of your Physical Therapy with you at your first post-operative appointment. We have a list of recommended Physical Therapists that will be provided to you at that time.

Driving:

Driving is something that is based purely on your ability to safely drive your car. In general, it is better to be safe than sorry, and only drive when you think you can be in complete control of your vehicle. You should furthermore never drive while taking the pain medication prescribed to you.

Common Concerns:

- Bruising and/or swelling of the affected limb will continue to develop and may change colors (blue to green to yellow) as time goes on. Gravity can pull the bruising and swelling downward into the fingers. Elevation and icing is the best way to alleviate this bruising and swelling.
- Numbness or tingling of the affected limb after surgery is common. This can be secondary to effects of the nerve block and irritation of nerves due to swelling.
- A sudden rush or feeling of fullness with pain when putting the affected limb in a dependent position is common after surgery.
- Use of the hands to open/close or to write or type is fine. Do not use the affected extremity to weight bear or carry anything greater than the weight of a pen. In general, it is fine to use the fingers for writing and typing
- Whether you can bend your elbow will depend on the procedure that was performed. Please ask Dr. Lee specifically about your activity restrictions.

Speaking to Dr. Lee after surgery:

Dr. Lee or someone from his team will reach out to you by phone after surgery. Please call 212-737-3301 and request to have Dr. Lee paged if you do not hear from Dr. Lee by 9:00 PM or miss his call.

Patient Portal:

A great option for contacting our team is through the NY Orthopedics Patient Portal. If you haven't already registered, you may do so by heading to <https://www.newyorkorthopedics.com> and clicking on "Patient Portal Log In" in the upper right hand corner of the screen. You should then click the link "Sign up today" and follow the instructions to create your account.

Call the office IMMEDIATELY for:

- Fever (>101.5°F) or chills
- Oozing or redness of the wound
- Severe, unbearable pain, that is not reduced with pain medication

Report to the nearest Emergency Room Immediately for:

- Difficulty breathing or heaviness/pain in the chest
- Symptoms of an allergic reaction such as a rash, swelling in places not operated on.

***REMEMBER - these are only guidelines for what to expect following surgery. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call the office or send a message through the Patient Portal.**