

Dr. Biswas' Thumb Arthritis Surgery Postoperative Instructions

Dressing and Wound Care

- After surgery, you will be in a **bulky dressing (bandage) with a plaster splint** that covers your thumb, wrist and forearm. The splint is similar to a cast. The splint cannot be removed and must be kept dry.
- When showering or bathing, cover the splint and your hand with a plastic bag to keep everything dry. The splint protects the incision and the surgical reconstruction, as well as lessen swelling.
- Elevate your hand above your heart as much as possible to lessen swelling and pain. Pillows and blankets under the arm are helpful when you go to sleep. Mild to moderate after surgery is common.

If your incision is red, foul-smelling, or there is drainage coming from it during daytime hours, call us right away at the number listed above. Go to the emergency room or urgent care if this happens at night or on the weekend.

Pain Management

Thumb surgical reconstruction can be painful. You will receive a prescription for narcotic pain medicine. **For the first 2-3 days, take the pain medication around the clock to stay on top of the pain control.** After 3 days, take the medicine only if you need it. If your pain is mild, you may take Tylenol (acetaminophen) instead. It is important to know that even with pain medication, you can still experience some pain.

- Be sure to talk with our staff about how to take your pain medication. Taking the correct dose at the right time is very important.
- If you have uncomfortable side effects from the pain medicine, please call our office.

Driving

- Do not drive if you are taking narcotic pain medication. It is not safe. The medicine can make you sleepy and delay your reaction.
- Once you are no longer taking the medicine, you may drive as soon as you can comfortably grip the steering wheel with both hands. It is generally best to avoid long drives until the initial dressing and plaster splint is removed.

Activity

- Right after surgery, you may begin gentle finger exercises. Your fingers and the tip of the thumb will be free. However, you will be unable to move the base of the thumb or your wrist because of the splint.
- You can use your hand for very light activities of daily living, such as eating, writing, typing, getting dressed, and brushing your teeth.
- Avoid any heavy gripping, pulling, or pinching with the thumb until your surgeon or therapist says you may do these things.

Follow-Up Plan

- When you leave the surgery center, you should have a **follow-up** already **10-14 days after surgery**. You may see a therapist prior to your first post-surgical visit with Dr. Biswas for a custom brace:
 - Your dressing and sutures will be removed.
 - You will be placed into a **custom removable thumb brace** made by the occupational therapist that includes the thumb and wrist.
- **You will wear this brace full-time to protect your thumb for 4 more weeks.** Brace may be removed for showering and gentle active motion exercises directed by the therapist only.
- The brace will be removed 6 weeks after surgery. At that time, you will continue wearing the brace for activities.
- At the 6 week time point, you will also begin more aggressive hand therapy, 2 x per week with the therapist, focusing on edema control, and range of motion at this time.
- **Three months after surgery**, you will not need to use any braces or splints to support your thumb. But, some patients like to use a soft neoprene (synthetic rubber) splint, such as one made by Comfort Cool, for support during heavier activities
- Strengthening exercises begin 3 months after your thumb surgery.

Results

- The first 6 weeks are difficult with pain, weakness, and stiffness in the thumb. Most patients have minimal pain by 3 months after surgery.
- Your symptoms will continue to improve with improvements in ability to do more activities every 3 months.
- Patient usually have good strength and motion at 6 months, and continue to improve for up to 1 year after surgery.
- Most patients have a significant improvement in their pain levels and are able to perform more activities after thumb CMC joint arthroplasty surgery. At the 3 month period, there are no activity restrictions.