



## **POSTOPERATIVE SHOULDER INSTRUCTIONS**

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Dear @NAME@,

I consider it an honor and privilege to provide you with the orthopaedic care that you deserve. OSF St. Francis Medical Center and Great Plains Orthopedics have long been recognized as a center of excellence for many reasons, not the least of which is our shared passion for helping people like you get back to the activities they love. My goal is to help you achieve yours.

We understand that preparing for surgery can be an overwhelming and sometimes confusing time. This packet of information is intended to streamline the post-operative process and answer many frequently asked questions.

Please contact the office with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Keith Corpus, MD  
Orthopaedic Surgery & Sports Medicine  
Great Plains/OSF Orthopaedics

## **GENERAL POST-OP INSTRUCTIONS**

### **DIET:**

- Begin with clear liquids and light foods (jello, soup, etc.). Progress to normal diet as tolerated if you are not nauseated.
- Avoid greasy or spicy foods for the first 24hrs to avoid GI upset.
- Increase fluid intake (water, Gatorade, etc.) to help prevent constipation.

### **ANESTHESIA:**

- The type of anesthesia administered will depend on a mutual decision between you, Dr. Corpus, and the anesthesia team. You will meet with the anesthesia team in the pre-operative area to discuss options.
  - Regional (nerve block) Anesthesia: is a technique where a portion of the patient's body is rendered insensitive (numb) so that you don't feel any pain during surgery. You will also be given sedation so that you sleep through the procedure, however you continue to breath on your own.
  - General Anesthesia: is when you are completely asleep during the procedure, and require a breathing tube.
- Shoulder arthroscopy can be done with either regional or general anesthetic effectively and decision will be made prior to surgery on a case by case basis after discussion with the patient.

### **PRESCRIBED MEDICATIONS:**

- Narcotic pain medicine (Norco): You will be given a prescription for 30 pills of Norco to be taken every 4-6 hours as needed for pain post-operatively. Every patient experiences pain differently, but most do not take narcotic pain medication for longer than about a week depending on the specific surgery performed. Given the current climate regarding narcotic pain medications, every effort will be made to limit narcotic prescribing, therefore please be aware that in most cases refills will not be provided. Narcotic pain medications may cause constipation, nausea, itching, and excessive drowsiness. You should take an over-the-counter stool softener (Colace and/or Senna) while taking narcotics to prevent constipation, but stop if you develop diarrhea. If you experience itching (another common side effect of narcotic pain medication), over the counter Benadryl may be helpful. Narcotic pain medications often produce drowsiness and it is against the law to operate a vehicle while taking these medications.
- Anti-inflammatory (NSAID) medicines: You will also be prescribed Celebrex or Naprosyn to be started once the indomethacin is completed. Do NOT take this medication if you have had an ulcer in the past unless you have cleared this with you primary care doctor. You should take NSAIDs with food to reduce the chance of upset stomach.
- Anti-nausea medicine (Zofran): sometimes patients experience nausea related to either anesthesia or the narcotic pain medication. If this is the case you will find this medication helpful.
- Anti-reflux medicine (Omeprazole): Anti-inflammatories can often result in GI upset and reflux. To combat this, we prescribe omeprazole which is taken once daily.
- DVT prophylaxis (Aspirin, Xarelto, Lovenox, or Coumadin): For most patients, activity alone is sufficient to prevent dangerous blood clots, but in some cases your personal risk profile and/or the type of surgery you have undergone makes it necessary that you take medication to help prevent blood clots. This will be prescribed by Dr. Corpus as need depending on the patient.
- Stool softener (Colace and/or Senna): are available over the counter at your local pharmacy and should be taken while you are taking narcotic pain medication to avoid

constipation. You should stop taking these medications if you develop diarrhea. Over the counter laxatives may be used if you develop painful constipation

#### **ICE:**

- Ice is a very important part of your recovery. It helps reduce inflammation and improves pain control. You should ice several times each day for 30 minutes at a time. Please make sure there is a thin piece of material (sheet or towel) between the ice and your skin.
- Typically, an ice machine will be offered in the preoperative visit if needed based on the actual surgery being performed. If you opted for one of the commercially available ice machines and a compression setting is available, you should use LOW or no compression during the first 5 days. After that, you may increase compression setting as tolerated. If the compression is bothering you then do not use compression.
- Ice as much as possible (30 minutes on, 30 minutes off, etc.). The more you ice during the first 2 weeks, the less pain, swelling, and inflammation you will experience.

#### **BANDAGES:**

- You may remove the outer dressing after 3 days. Until the dressing has been removed, keep clean and dry.
- You will find stitches in the skin underneath the dressing. It is fine to leave these open to air. However, if you notice any drainage or if the stitches are sticking to clothing, you can feel free to cover with dry gauze or waterproof Band-Aids.
- In some cases you will also see Steri-Strips (small white Band-Aids). Leave the Steri-Strips in place.

#### **INCISION:**

- Keep your incision clean and dry until your first postoperative visit, approximately 10-14 days after surgery. Do NOT get incisions wet as this increases the risk of developing an infection.
- After the bandage has been removed, you may leave the incisions open to air. Alternatively, if you prefer to keep them covered, you may do so with Band-Aids or a light gauze dressing.
- Please try to keep dry while in the shower. Plastic wrap can be used to help keep dry.
- Do NOT apply any ointment or creams to the incision.
- Do NOT clean the incision.

#### **CONSTIPATION**

Begin the following if no bowel movement by 3 days after surgery. All of the medications listed below can be obtained from your local pharmacy over-the-counter. Stop if you develop diarrhea. Patients under age 18 should NOT use this regimen.

- **Postoperative Day 4-5:** Colace 100mg caps 3 times per day AND Senna 2 tabs at bedtime. Increase by 2 tabs at mealtimes up to a maximum of 8 tabs per day if no bowel movement.
- **Postoperative Day 6:** Continue above medications AND add Milk of Magnesia 30ml (2 tablespoons) 1-2 times per day.
- **Postoperative Day 7:** Continue above medications AND add a Biscodyl rectal suppository or try a Fleets enema.

#### **SHOWER:**

- You may shower after the bandage has been removed (3 days), but it is very important that you keep sutures dry. Covering them with saran wrap is often a very inexpensive

and effective way to stay dry. There are a number of other water-repellent bandages available at your local pharmacy that work as well.

- As your balance may be affected by recent surgery, we recommend placing a plastic chair or bench in the shower to help prevent falls.
- Do NOT take baths, go into a pool, or soak the operative site until approved by Dr. Corpus at your first postoperative visit.

#### **PHYSICAL THERAPY:**

- You will have physical therapy after the procedure. Specifics of the protocol and timing will be directed by Dr. Corpus. Prescription for therapy will be provided.
- Post-operative exercises will also be instructed at the pre-operative visit.

#### **DRIVING:**

- You may drive when you are (1) ambulating without a limp and without a brace (2) when you are no longer taking narcotic pain medication.
- It is against the law to drive while taking any narcotic pain medication (even when legally prescribed).

#### **TRAVEL:**

- Avoid long distance traveling after surgery. It is important to discuss your travel plans with Dr. Corpus, as additional medications may need to be prescribed to help prevent blood clots if certain travel is unavoidable.

#### **RETURNING TO WORK OR SCHOOL:**

- Typically, you may return to sedentary work or school 3-7 days after surgery if pain is tolerable and you are no longer requiring narcotic pain medication during work/school hours.
- Dr. Corpus will determine when you may return to more physically rigorous demands.
- If you require any specific letters for work or school please let us know.

#### **NORMAL SENSATIONS AND FINDINGS AFTER SURGERY:**

- **PAIN:** surgery hurts. We do everything possible to make your pain/discomfort level tolerable, but some amount of pain is to be expected.
- **WARMTH:** mild amount of warmth around the operative site is normal for up to 3 weeks.
- **REDNESS:** small amount of redness where the sutures enter the skin is normal. If redness worsens or spreads it is important that you contact the office.
- **DRAINAGE:** a small amount is normal for the first 48-72 hours. If wounds continue to drain after this time, you need to contact the office.
- **NUMBNESS:** around the incision is common.
- **BRUISING:** is common and often tracks down the leg due to gravity and results in an alarming appearance, but is common and will resolve with time.
- **FEVER:** low-grade fevers (less than 101.5°F) are common during the first week after surgery. You should drink plenty of fluids and breathe deeply. A low-grade temperature is normal for a week after the surgery.

#### **PLEASE BE ADVISED OF THE FOLLOWING:**

Most orthopedic surgical procedures are uneventful. However, complications can occur. The following are things to be aware of in the immediate postoperative period.

- **FEVER** – Low-grade fever is common after orthopaedic surgery, particularly within the first 5 days. Please notify Dr. Corpus if your temperature rises above 101.5°F.

- **BLEEDING** – It is fairly common to have minor bleeding that can even soak through the bandages. Notify us if the wound drains any fluid more than 4 days after surgery.
- **CARDIOVASCULAR** – Chest pain, shortness of breath, palpitations, or fainting spells must be taken seriously. Go to the emergency room (or call 911) immediately for evaluation. Someone should notify both Dr. Corpus and your primary care doctor.
- **BLOOD CLOTS** – Orthopaedic surgery patients are at risk for blood clots. While the risk is higher for lower extremity surgery, even those who have undergone upper extremity surgery are at an increased risk. Please notify Dr. Corpus if you or someone in your family has had blood clots or any type of known clotting disorder.
  - Obesity or use of oral contraceptives can increase the risk of blood clots. Women should consider stopping oral contraceptive use until able to walk normally without crutches, brace, or cast on the leg.
  - Traveling after surgery – Long flights or car trips may increase the chance of blood clots. If you need to travel in the first 4 weeks after surgery, please inform us so that additional medication may be prescribed as necessary.
  - Signs of blood clots may include calf pain or cramping, diffuse swelling in the leg and foot, or chest pain and shortness of breath. Please call if you recognize any of these symptoms. There is noninvasive testing available to rule out this potentially life threatening condition.
- **CONSTIPATION** – It is common to become constipated from taking narcotic pain medications so you may need to use a stool softener or laxative. These are available over the counter at any pharmacy.

#### **NOTIFY US IMMEDIATELY FOR ANY OF THE FOLLOWING:**

- Temperature greater than 101.5°F.
- Severe nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, or constipation.
- Chest pain or shortness of breath (go to ER).
- Sutures become loose or fall out and incision becomes open.
- Change is noted to your incision (increased redness or drainage).
- Drainage persists greater than 4 days or becomes yellow or foul smelling.
- Increased pain unrelieved by medication or measures mentioned above.

#### **FOLLOW-UP:**

- Follow-up appointment should be arranged for 10-14 days after surgery. If one has not been provided, please call the office to schedule.

#### **Postoperative FAQs**

##### **WHAT ARE SOME WARNING SIGNS OF INFECTION?**

- If you have a measured temperature greater than 101.5°F, recurrent chills, yellow or foul smelling drainage, or increasing redness around the incisions you should call the office.

##### **WHAT IF I HAVE A LOW-GRADE FEVER AFTER SURGERY?**

- A low-grade fever (less than 101.5°F) during the first week after your surgery is common. This is a normal response by your body to the stress of surgery. Drinking plenty of fluids and taking deep breaths is helpful.

##### **IS THE SWELLING NORMAL?**

- Yes, some swelling is normal. For shoulder surgery, it will be worse when the arm and hand are down and better when elevated. Elevation and ice can be very helpful. If the swelling does not go down or you start to develop calf pain please notify the office.

#### **WHY IS THERE BRUISING THAT TRACKS DOWN THE OPERATIVE LIMB?**

- This is normal after surgery. Blood from the surgical site is pulled down by gravity and causes bruising in locations away from the area that was operated on. Some people get bruising into the wrist and hand after surgery. You should not be alarmed it will resolve over 3-5 weeks. The amount of such bruising varies by person.

#### **IS PAIN NORMAL?**

- Yes, surgery is painful. The most pain will occur within the first 72 hours after surgery. There is no purpose in “being a hero” during this time. During the early postoperative period, pain is like fire, if you wait too long to put it out it gets out of control. Take your pain medicines when scheduled for the first few days and then you can begin to space them out. Remember, it takes 30-45 minutes for a pain pill to begin working, so do not wait for the pain to become unbearable before taking the next dose. Also, ice is one of the most important parts of pain relief.

#### **HOW OFTEN SHOULD I ICE?**

- Ice and elevation are your best friends! You should ice around the clock (30 minutes on, 30 minutes off) for the first 3-5 days. Then ice at least 3 times per day thereafter. Be sure to place a thin towel between the ice and your skin.

#### **SHOULD FLUID DRAINING FROM THE INCISIONS ALARM ME?**

- For arthroscopic shoulder surgery, some draining fluid onto the dressing is normal during the first 24-48 hours because we use large amount of water during the surgery and it is therefore only natural for some of this fluid to leak out while your body absorbs the rest. If the bulky bandage becomes wet and red, do not be alarmed; just reinforce it with another bandage. If you have persistent drainage 4 days after surgery, please contact the office.

#### **HOW DO I TAKE OFF THE BANDAGE?**

- You may remove the dressing 72 hours after surgery. For shoulder surgery, undo the ACE wrap and any soft cotton underneath. Then remove the white and yellow gauze underneath. The incisions can stay open to air at this point. You may cover them if you wish with clean Band-Aids, or loose gauze dressing so it does not rub/catch on your clothes. Do NOT apply any ointments, creams, or gels.

#### **HOW DO I ELEVATE?**

- For lower extremity surgery, prop the leg up (elevation) using several pillows or blankets underneath. Elevation is extremely important to limits swelling and pain after surgery. Proper elevation works by gravity. The foot should be higher than the knee, which should be higher than the hip allowing gravity to pull the fluid/swelling back towards the heart.

#### **WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN I DO?**

- It is very important for you to do as much activity as possible while still adhering to the limits imposed by Dr. Corpus. Simply getting up and walking around the house is important. This will decrease the possibilities of post-anesthesia problems such as

pneumonia and blood clots. Generally, if you have a job with little physical activity, you may return to work 3-7 days after surgery. If your job requires excessive lifting or use of the arm, then discuss your return to work date with your doctor. That being said, always be mindful of weightbearing and range of motion restrictions discussed by Dr. Corpus and the physical therapist.

#### **WHEN CAN I DRIVE?**

- Prescription narcotic pain medications impair your motor skill, reaction time and judgment. It is against the law to drive while taking prescription pain medications (even if they were prescribed for you). It is also against the law to drive while you are wearing a sling as it prevents you from using both arms. Please discussed with Dr. Corpus before returning to driving.

#### **WHAT HAPPENS AT MY FIRST POST-OPERATIVE VISIT?**

- Your first postoperative visit typically occurs 10-14 days after surgery. Dr. Corpus will review your surgery and any arthroscopic photographs. He will outline your post-operative physical therapy protocol. If you have sutures that need to be removed, they will be.

#### **WHAT IF I NEED A PAIN MEDICINE REFILL?**

- Only your doctor and his staff can call in pain medication. During the weekend, on call doctors will NOT call in prescriptions for you. Therefore, if you feel that you will need a prescription during the weekend, please call the office during regular business hours. You can also reach out to us via OSF MyChart. As stated previously, every effort will be made to prevent narcotic pain medication refills. Most patients do not require narcotics beyond one week. Therefore, anti-inflammatories and tylenol should be used to transition off narcotics as early as possible.