

Craig S. Mauro, MD  
Discharge Instructions  
Elbow Surgery

A successful recovery after elbow surgery includes controlling swelling and discomfort, healing, regaining normal range of motion of the elbow joint, regaining strength in the muscles around the elbow joint, and gradually returning to preoperative activities. The following instructions are intended as a guide to help you achieve these goals until your 1<sup>st</sup> postoperative visit.

**A. Comfort:**

Although surgery uses only a few small incisions around the elbow joint, swelling and discomfort can be present. To minimize discomfort, please do the following:

1. **Ice:** Ice controls swelling and discomfort by slowing down the circulation in your elbow. Place crushed ice in plastic bag over your elbow 4-6 times every day for no more than 20 minutes at a time. Ice can be used while the initial post-op dressing and splint are on. Once the initial dressing has been removed, place a thin towel between your skin and the ice.
2. **Elevation:** Elevate your hand and elbow above the level of your heart. The best position is lying down with two pillows under your arm or with your arm in a Carter pillow (if provided). Elevation should be done for the first several days after surgery.
3. **Pain Medication:** Take medications as prescribed, but only as often as necessary. Avoid alcohol and driving if you are taking pain medication.
4. **Nerve Block:** You may have received a nerve block at the time of surgery. Nerve blocks typically wear off 12-18 hours after they are administered. When you begin to feel some discomfort, take your first dose of pain medication. Do not wait until the pain is severe, as it may be more difficult to control the pain then.
5. **Sling:** A sling has been provided for your comfort. You should wear the sling for the first few days after surgery and then only as needed for comfort.
6. **Sleeping:** Sleeping in an easy chair or recliner may be most comfortable for the first few days after surgery. You may sleep without the sling.

**B. Medication:**

You have been given prescriptions for pain medication and a stool softener to take after surgery. Depending on your medical history and the type of surgery performed, you may or may not be given a prescription for an anti-inflammatory medication or a medication to prevent a blood clot. Please let Dr. Mauro know if you have an allergy or sensitivity to any of these medications.

1. **Pain Relief:** Percocet (oxycodone/acetaminophen) 5/325mg, 1-2 tablets every 4-6 hours as needed for pain
2. **Stool Softener:** Colace (docusate sodium) 100mg, 1 capsule twice a day as needed for constipation while taking pain medication
3. **Anti-inflammatory:** Naprosyn (naproxen) 500mg, 1 tablet twice a day with food for 2 weeks then as needed for inflammation
4. **Blood Clot (DVT) Prevention:** Aspirin 325mg, 1 tablet once a day with food to prevent blood clots

**C. Eating:**

1. Your first few meals after surgery should include light, easily digestible foods and plenty of liquids.
2. Some people experience slight nausea as a temporary reaction to anesthesia.

**D. Activities:**

1. Your elbow will be immobilized with a splint until you are seen at your first postoperative visit.
2. Move your shoulder and fingers of your operative arm to prevent stiffness and reduce swelling.
3. Physical therapy will not begin until your splint is removed. Depending on the surgery performed, therapy will begin 2-4 weeks after surgery. You will discuss physical therapy at your first postoperative visit.
4. Your ability to return to work depends on your level of discomfort and how much demand your job puts on your arm. If you have any questions, please discuss them with Dr. Mauro.
5. Athletic activities such as throwing, lifting, swimming, bicycling, jogging, running, and stop-and-go sports should be avoided until cleared by Dr. Mauro.
6. Driving is not permitted as long as your arm is in a splint or brace. This may be as long as 6 weeks following surgery.

**E. Wound Care:**

1. Keep the splint and dressing on, clean, and dry until you are seen at your first postoperative appointment. At this visit you will be placed in a cast or brace, depending on what surgery was performed.
2. You may shower 3 days after surgery, covering your splint with a large plastic bag secured with tape or cast protector to keep it dry. Cast protectors may be purchased independently by calling Dry Cast at 1-800-DRYCAST (1-800-379-2278). You may tub bathe if you can support your arm out of the tub so that the splint and dressing remain dry.
3. Swimming and soaking should be avoided until allowed by Dr. Mauro.

**F. Call Dr. Mauro If:**

1. Pain persists or worsens in the first few days after surgery.
2. You note excessive drainage or foul smelling odor coming from the splint.
3. You have a fever greater than 101°.
4. You have pain, swelling, or redness in your arm or hand or legs that is unrelieved with elevation.
5. You have numbness, weakness, or a burning sensation in your arm or hand or legs.
6. You have any questions or concerns at any time.

**G. Return to the Office:**

Your first office appointment should be within the first 7-10 days after your surgery. Call Dr. Mauro's office to make your first postoperative appointment if it was not already made.

Your first postoperative appointment with Dr. Mauro is: \_\_\_\_\_