About Your Hand Surgery
What you need to know

General Information

- Be prepared to follow up with your surgeon within 2 weeks of surgery and again 6 weeks after surgery.
- Remember to go to your 2-week post-operative visit. This visit is vital to your care.
- In certain cases, your family doctor or hand therapist may be allowed to remove your stitches.
- Fracture Patients: Keep your post-op splint on until your 2-week appointment. At that time, your splint will be removed and you will be placed in a cast for about 1 month.
- Total Joint Patients: Be prepared to be off work for about 3 months after your dressings are removed. You will be in a hard cast for about 6 weeks.
- Hand Therapy: Some patients may need physical and/or occupational therapy within days of surgery.
- You will NOT be able to drive yourself home after surgery. Arrange for someone to take you home after your surgery.
- Do not plan vacations for at least 6 weeks after surgery. You will have clinic visits to make. Please check with your surgeon or nurse about your schedule.
- Dressings: Post-op dressings or splints should fit snugly, but should not cut off circulation. If you have any questions about this, please call the Hand Nurse at 206-598-5494.
- Constipation: Surgery, anesthesia, and pain medicines may cause constipation. To avoid constipation, use stool softeners or laxatives, drink prune juice, and eat a high-fiber diet as a natural laxative.
Questions and Answers

Q: How many stitches will it take?
A: As many as are needed to close the incision properly.

Q: Is it normal to have bruising?
A: It is normal to have bruising after surgery. It can take up to 4 weeks for most of the bruising to go away.

Q: Is it normal for my hand to swell a lot?
A: Swelling is a normal part of the healing process. Swelling usually is greatest about 1 to 2 days after surgery. After that, it will slowly lessen. It is important to keep your hand or arm elevated, get plenty of rest, and ice the hand or arm, as this helps to reduce swelling. Ask your nurse to show you how to apply ice to your hand or arm.

Q: Do I need antibiotics before dental work?
A: No, only in rare cases. We will tell you if antibiotics are needed.

Q: What are the signs of infection?
A: Signs of infection include increased redness, warmth, increased pain, and foul-smelling discharge from the incision site. A fever higher than 101.5°F (38.6°C), chills, or sweats may also be a sign of infection.

Q: My appetite is not very good. Is this OK?
A: It is normal to have a decreased appetite after surgery. Try to eat small amounts of food with your medicines to lessen the risk of nausea or vomiting. It is important to drink plenty of liquids while your hand or arm is healing.

Q: I had surgery 2 months ago and I still notice some swelling at the end of the day. Is this normal?
A: It is normal, even months after surgery, to have swelling in your hand or arm. This can occur with increased use of the hand or arm, return to work, in warm weather, or after exercising. The swelling will usually lessen with rest, ice, and elevation.

Q: Do metal implants set off the alarm in airports?
A: No. The implants used in hand surgery do not set off detectors in airports. With the rapid changes in security, we are unsure if this will continue to be the case in the future. To be prepared, you can ask us for a card verifying that you have a surgical implant.