



After Your Thumb Carpometacarpal Joint Arthroplasty Surgery

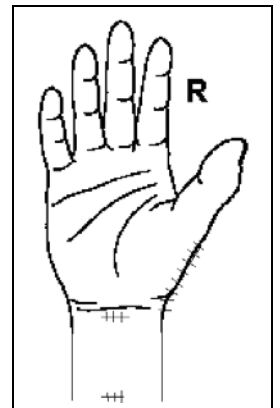
Self-care and follow-up

This handout explains follow-up care after arthroplasty surgery on your thumb carpometacarpal (CMC) joint.

If your incisions are red or there is drainage coming from them, call us right away at the phone numbers listed on the next page. Go to the emergency room if this occurs at night or on a weekend.

Wound Care

- Right after surgery, your arm will be placed in a bulky *dressing* (bandage). A plaster splint will cover your thumb, wrist, and forearm.
- Elevate your hand often to lessen swelling. Mild to moderate swelling after surgery is normal.
- When you shower, cover your splint with a plastic bag to keep it dry.



Incision sites on a right hand.

Pain Management

- You will receive a prescription for narcotic pain medicine. Take this medicine only if you need it.
- Be sure to talk with the clinic nurse about how to take your pain medicine. To best manage your pain, you must take your pain medicine the way it was prescribed. Taking the correct dose at the right time is very important.
- If you have uncomfortable side effects from the pain medicine, call the nurse at 206-598-4263.
- Please see “Medications After Surgery” for more instructions.
- It is normal to have some pain off and on for up to 1 year after surgery, especially in cold weather.

Driving

- Do **not** drive if you are taking narcotic pain medicine. It is not safe. The medicine can make you sleepy and delay your reaction time.
- Once you are no longer taking the medicine, you may drive as soon as you can comfortably grip the steering wheel with both hands.

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Questions or Concerns?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Weekdays, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.: Call the Hand Center at **206-598-4263**.

After office hours and on weekends and holidays: Call the hospital operator at **206-598-6190**. Ask for the Hand Fellow on call to be paged. Your call will be returned.

For more information, please visit the Hand Center online at www.uwhand.com.

Activity

- Right after surgery, you may begin gentle finger exercises. You will not be able to move your thumb or wrist because of the dressing.
- You can use your hand for daily tasks such as getting dressed, typing, combing your hair, preparing food, and other light activities.
- Avoid any heavy gripping, lifting, or pinching until your surgeon or physical therapist says you may do these things.

Follow-up

- When you leave the surgery center, you should have a follow-up appointment in the **Hand Center** already set for 10 to 14 days after surgery. At that visit:
 - Your sutures will be removed.
 - Your hand therapist will make a **removable thumb brace** to fit your hand and thumb. You will wear this brace to protect your thumb for 4 to 6 weeks.
- At 4 to 6 weeks after surgery, you will still wear the brace for activities, but you can remove it when you are not active.
- At 6 weeks after surgery, you will also begin more vigorous hand therapy. You will see your hand therapist 2 times a week. The exercises you learn will help control fluid buildup and improve your range of motion.
- At 3 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* (man-made rubber) splint, such as one made by Comfort Cool, for support during heavier activities.
- You will begin exercises to strengthen your hand 3 months after surgery.

Results

- Your symptoms will continue to improve. About every 3 months, you should see improvements in your ability to do more activities.
- Patients usually continue to improve for up to 1 year after surgery.
- Most patients have much less pain and are able to do more activities after they recover from thumb CMC joint arthroplasty surgery.

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