



# Carpal Tunnel Release Surgery

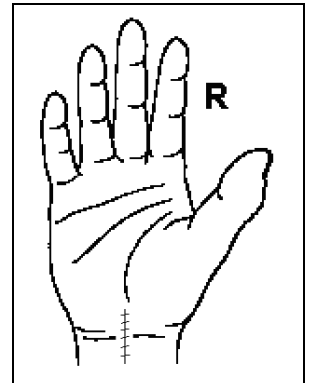
*Self-care and follow-up after your surgery*

This handout explains follow-up care after endoscopic surgery to release your carpal tunnel.

If your incision is red or there is drainage coming from it, 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

- You will have a vertical incision on your wrist. It will be less than 1 inch (2 centimeters) long.
- After surgery, your hand and wrist will be placed in a plaster splint. This helps protect your incision site and lessens swelling.
- Until you see the hand therapist, you will need to keep your dressing dry. When you shower, cover your hand and splint with a plastic bag.
- You will see a Certified Hand Therapist 4 to 5 days after surgery. The therapist will remove your splint and work on your range of motion.



The incision site shown on the wrist of a right hand

After your splint is removed:

- Put a small bandage over your stitches to keep them from getting caught on your clothes or other fabrics.
- You may shower without covering the incision, but do not soak your hand in the bathtub, hot tub, kitchen sink, swimming pool, or any other water.
- Do **not** put any ointment or lotion on your wound.
- Your wrist and palm may swell. Use an ice pack for up to 20 minutes at a time over your incision to help control swelling. Be sure to place a thin cloth between your skin and the ice pack to protect your skin.
- Elevate your hand as much as possible to lessen swelling and pain.

## Pain Management

- You will receive a prescription for narcotic pain medicine. Take this medicine only if you need it.

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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](http://www.uwhand.com).

- 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.

## 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.

## Activity

- You can use your hand for light daily activities such as driving, getting dressed, typing, etc.
- Do not lift objects heavier than a full soda can (about 1 pound or .45 kilogram) until the sutures have been removed.
- Avoid heavy repetitive activities such as hammering. These will increase scarring and may lead to a longer recovery time.
- You may do light aerobic exercises as soon as 1 or 2 days after surgery. Avoid any heavy lifting, such as weightlifting, until 4 weeks after surgery.

## Follow-up

- Before you leave the surgery center you should have a follow-up visit already set up with an occupational hand therapist for 4 to 5 days after surgery.
- You will see the occupational therapist and your surgeon at your 2-week visit after surgery. Your sutures will be removed at this visit.
- Once your sutures are removed, you can increase your activities as tolerated. Avoid heavy repetitive activities, such as hammering, until 4 weeks after surgery.

## Results

Most patients who have carpal tunnel surgery regain full use of their hand, with full return of motion and strength.

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