

Hand or Arm Surgery

How to prepare, what to expect, and follow-up care

This handout explains how to prepare for your hand or arm surgery. It includes what to expect at your follow-up visits at Harborview Hand Clinic.

Before Your Surgery



Getting Ready

- We will give you:
 - 2 packages of chlorhexidine cloths to prepare your skin, with instructions on how to use them
 - A handout on when you need to stop eating and drinking before your surgery
- Ask your primary care provider (PCP) if there is anything else you need to do to prepare for this surgery.
- If you have questions and your surgeon is not in clinic on that day, we may refer you to your primary care clinic, urgent care, or the Emergency Department.

Prepare Your Home

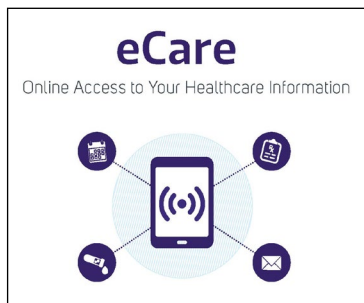
If you can, set up a place in your home where you will be able to sit with your hand or arm up. Have a small table next to your chair or recliner for water, medicine, and food.

After Surgery



For Your Safety

- A responsible adult must be with you on your ride home from the hospital.
- This person or another adult must stay with you for the first 24 hours.



Sign Up for eCare

UW Medicine eCare is a free, secure, and easy way to access your health information and manage clinic visits online.

You can use eCare to:

- *Send messages and photos to your care team*
- *Access test or lab results*
- *Print your referrals*
- *Access some of your medical records*

To sign up for eCare:

- *Visit the eCare website: <http://ecare.uwmedicine.org/prod01/accesscheck.asp>.*
- *Or, text the word "ecare" to 206.520.5000.*

Pain After Surgery

Some pain or discomfort is normal after surgery. Keeping pain under control will help your body heal. Our goal is to reduce your pain so that you can do light activities without severe pain.

Right after surgery, you may have no pain at first. This is because you may receive numbing medicines before and during surgery. The numbing medicine can last 8 to 12 hours. When this numbness wears off, pain may increase quickly.

Pain Control

Before surgery, talk with your doctor about your pain control options. This will help you make clear decisions about what medicines to take and when to take them.

Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, use both acetaminophen (Tylenol) and ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) to control your pain:

- **Before** you have pain, start taking acetaminophen and ibuprofen on a regular basis. Set a schedule that works and stick to it. This will help control your pain. Follow the doses given on the bottles.
- When the pain starts, you can also use the opioid pills your doctor prescribed, if needed.

Opioids

Opioids are strong medicines. They can help lessen pain, but they also have side effects. Sometimes people become physically *dependent* on them.

Being dependent means needing to take more and more of the medicine to get the same results. Someone who is dependent on opioids will have withdrawal symptoms when they stop taking them.

Your need for strong pain medicine should lessen within a few days after surgery. Many people who have hand surgery never need to take opioids. If you do take opioids, do **not** use them as your only source of pain control.

Your Medicine Plan

Take your acetaminophen and ibuprofen on a regular schedule and at a consistent dose. You can take them at the same time, or stagger them. This is the “core” of your pain control plan.

Sample Medicine Schedule

The chart below lists what time to take each medicine. Take each medicine in the right column at the time listed in the left column (whether it is day or night). Review this chart with your provider, and ask if you have any questions about how to use it on your own.

When your pain is under control, **stop taking the oxycodone**. If your pain returns, re-start your pain medicines at the next closest time listed below.



If you have unused or expired opioid medicines, you can:

Take the bottle to a Harborview Take-Back Kiosk:

Ground Floor, Center Tower
Weekdays 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.; weekends and holidays 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Ninth & Jefferson Building
Weekdays 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m.; Saturdays 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Or, find a Medicine Take-Back Location near you. Visit www.takebackyourmeds.org for a list of locations.

Day 1	
Time	Medicines
12	Oxycodone
2	Acetaminophen
4	Ibuprofen
6	Oxycodone
8	Acetaminophen
10	Ibuprofen
Day 2	
Time	Medicines
12	Oxycodone
2	Acetaminophen
4	Ibuprofen
6	Oxycodone
8	Acetaminophen
10	Ibuprofen
Day 3	
Time	Medicines
12	Oxycodone
2	Acetaminophen
4	Ibuprofen
6	Oxycodone
8	Acetaminophen
10	Ibuprofen

A nurse shows how to prop your affected arm and hand on a pillow to keep them above the level of your heart.



Sitting



Lying down

How to Take and Taper Opioids

Strong pain that does not lessen with other methods can be treated with an opioid such as *oxycodone*. Opioids are taken **for severe pain** as needed, every 4 to 6 hours. The label on the opioid bottle gives the maximum (highest) dose you can take:

- **Never take more than the maximum dose your provider prescribed.** Taking too much opioid can cause breathing to stop. It can even cause death.

- If your pain is under control, take less than the maximum dose.

Your pain will lessen quickly in the days after your surgery. Take less opioid medicine each day. This is called *tapering* or *weaning* your dose.

To taper your opioid dose, you can either:

- Take smaller doses each time; or
- Wait longer between doses.

Your goal is to no longer need opioids and to use other medicines and methods of pain control. Call the clinic with any questions.

Other Ways to Ease Pain

Pain medicines help only with comfort. They do not heal. To help your body heal and to lessen pain, swelling, and bruising:

- Plan to rest for about 48 hours after surgery.
- For 24 to 48 hours, keep your affected hand and arm above the level of your heart as much as you can. Rest your arm on a pillow while you are sitting in a chair or couch. (See photos on the left.)
- Don't wait to feel pain before you start resting or raising your arm. Too much activity, or allowing the arm to hang down, will cause pain to build up and it may be hard to get back on track.

Activities

Starting 48 hours after surgery, you may be able to start doing some light activities. Please follow the activity instruction on your discharge paperwork. Ask questions if anything is unclear.

Driving

- Do **not** drive while taking opioids. The medicine can affect your judgment and response time, which makes it unsafe to drive.
- In the state of Washington, it is legal to drive when you have a cast. It is up to you to decide if you can drive safely.
- Once you are no longer taking the medicine, you may drive as soon as you can comfortably grip the steering wheel with both hands.

Occupational Therapy

You may have occupational therapy as part of your rehabilitation. Your doctor may give you a prescription to have therapy at Harborview or at a therapy facility near your home. To find your nearest Certified Hand Therapist (CHT), visit www.htcc.org.

When to Call

Call the nurse or clinic if you have:

- Sudden new swelling
- Severe or new pain
- 101.5°F (38.6°C) or higher
- Redness, swelling, or drainage from your incision site
- A cold feeling in the limb that had surgery
- A pale or blue color in the limb that had surgery
- New numbness or tingling in the limb that had surgery

Follow-up Visits

Please bring your own pain medicine or Tylenol when you come to your suture removal follow-up visit. We do not keep pain pills in our clinic.

Your follow-up visits will be:

- 2 to 3 weeks after surgery
- 6 weeks after surgery
- 3 months after surgery
- As your doctor advises

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have any questions or concerns.

Harborview Outpatient Orthopedic Pharmacy

If you have questions about your medicines, call our voice mail line weekdays, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at **206.744.8701** (or call toll free: 877.744.3718). Please leave a detailed message and a pharmacist will call you back.

Harborview Hand Clinic

Weekdays between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., call 206.744.4263. Press 2 when you hear the recording.

UW Medicine Nurse Line

After hours and on weekends and holidays, call 206.520.5000

You may also send your question in an eCare message (see “Sign Up for eCare” on page 2).