

Protecting Your Shoulder After Surgery

This handout explains how to protect your shoulder after surgery by following important safety rules. It also shares tips for moving and doing everyday activities safely while you recover.

Safety Precautions

Follow these instructions after your surgery:

- Do **not** move your shoulder until your surgery team clears you (tells you it is safe). It is ok to start moving your elbow, wrist, and hand.
- **Always** wear your sling until your surgery team clears you. You will wear your sling for at least 2-6 weeks. This includes when you are sleeping or sitting in a chair. You can use a pillow under your elbow to support your arm when you are sitting up.
- Do not use your surgical arm to push up from a chair or bed.

You have the following weight-bearing restriction with your surgical arm (*ask your provider to select one*):

- ☐ **Non-Weight Bearing (NWB):** You should not use your surgical arm to hold anything.
- ☐ **Coffee-Cup Weight Bearing (CCWB):** You can use your surgical arm to hold light items, up to the weight of a coffee cup (about 1 pound).

At your follow-up visit, your surgery team will let you know how much longer you need to continue following these precautions.

Activities of Daily Living After Shoulder Surgery

Ask for help if you cannot do any of these activities safely without moving your surgical arm.

Eating and Self-Care

- Use your non-surgical arm to eat, comb your hair, wash your face, and do all other personal care tasks.



This is the correct way to wear your sling.



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Sleeping

- It is usually easiest to get in and out of bed on the non-surgical side.
- Avoid lying on your surgical arm. Lying on your back or sleeping in a recliner chair may be the most comfortable position.
- When lying down, you can put pillows under your elbow and hand, but **not** under your shoulder.

Getting Dressed

- It is ok to take off your sling when putting on your shirt, but **do not move your shoulder**. You can use pillows to support your elbow while you get dressed.
- It is easiest to wear loose-fitting T-shirts or button-downs.
- Dress your surgical arm first. Slide the sleeve above your elbow, then pull the shirt over your head. When undressing, pull your non-surgical arm out first.
- If you wear a bra, it may be easiest to wear a style that clasps in the front.

Using the Toilet

- Until your surgery team clears you, use your non-surgical arm for wiping.
- A *bidet* (water sprayer) is another option for cleaning yourself more carefully.
- Your OT (occupational therapist) may suggest using a toileting aid and will show you how to use it.

Bathing

- Do **not** shower until your surgery team tells you it is ok. You can take sponge baths until you are allowed to shower.
- When washing your body, you can remove your sling, but do **not** use your surgical arm.
- Sitting down while you shower can improve your balance and safety.

Riding in a Car

- Do **not** drive until your surgeon tells you it is ok.
- **Always** wear your seatbelt.
- If you are traveling a long distance, plan to get out of the car and stretch every hour. This will help prevent your muscles from getting too stiff. Moving regularly also helps prevent blood clots in your legs.

Questions?

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