

# Care After Shoulder Surgery

## After Visit Summary

You had surgery on your shoulder. Your health care team will work with you to understand any challenges you have after your hospital stay. This will help your team work toward a plan to make sure you have the right care and support after you leave the hospital.

## What to Expect After Surgery

The time it takes to heal after surgery is different for each person.

- Common symptoms following shoulder surgery include:
  - swelling, pain, discomfort and stiffness in the shoulder
  - a decrease in energy
  - skin numbness around the incision
  - low appetite
  - constipation.

## Pain Relief

Follow your surgeon's instructions for pain medicine. Your pain should lessen each week after surgery. Other ways to decrease your pain are:

- When lying in bed, support your shoulder and arm with one or two pillows. Sleeping in a recliner may give extra comfort.
- Put a washcloth or handkerchief under the shoulder strap of the sling to protect your neck. Or put the sling over the collar of your shirt.

- Use a cold pack for pain relief.
  - Place a clean, dry towel on your shoulder.
  - Put the cold pack on the towel.
  - Leave the cold pack on for 20 minutes at a time.
  - Apply the ice pack as needed.
- Taking prescription pain medicine can cause constipation. To avoid constipation:
  - Drink 6 to 8, 8-ounce glasses of liquid each day. Water is your best choice.
  - Eat high-fiber foods.
  - Be as active as possible. Follow your surgeon's instructions for exercise.
  - Do not drink alcohol.
- Take your pain medicine with food to help prevent an upset stomach.
- Slowly cut back on opioid pain medicine once your pain starts to decrease. Take less opioid pain medicine or extend the time between doses. For example instead of 2 pain tablets cut back to 1 pain tablet or take 1 tablet every 6 hours instead of every 4 hours.

## Activity

- Your surgeon will tell you when it's OK for you to drive, return to work, exercise, lift, have sex, and return to contact sports.
- Do any exercises given to you by your surgeon.

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- Get regular activity. Try to walk for a total of 30 minutes a day.
  - Start by walking for 5 to 10 minutes at one time and slowly build to walking 30 minutes.
  - Walk often. Try to walk at least 4 to 5 times a day.
  - Walk more as you are able.
- Follow your surgeon's directions for when to wear a sling or shoulder immobilizer
- Follow weight-bearing restrictions your therapist taught you.
- Do not lie flat in bed.
- Do not sleep on your surgery arm.
- Keep your elbow close to your chest. Be careful not to fall.
- Follow your surgeon's directions for cleaning your underarms.
  - With your sling removed lean forward and let your arm hang straight down.
  - Wash your underarm by gently passing a washcloth from the front to the back. Dry in the same manner.
- Avoid tobacco and secondhand smoke.

## Incision Care

Taking care of your incision is important to help your shoulder heal. It will also prevent infection and decrease scarring.

- Look at your incision every day while it heals.
- If your wound has staples they will be removed at your follow-up visit.
- Do not use lotions, creams, salves, powders or ointment on your incision site
- Follow your surgeon's instructions about showering and care of your incision.

## When To Call Your Surgeon

Call your surgeon if:

- you have a temperature of 101.6 F or higher
- you have red bloody drainage that soaks the dressing, cast or both
- you have signs of infection or a blood clot. Symptoms may include your hand:
  - becomes dusky-colored (bluish purple) or turns red
  - is hot or cold to the touch
  - has a new tenderness, new pain or pain you can't control
  - becomes numb, tingles or swells
  - has a foul-smelling odor
  - has green or yellow discharge.

## Follow-up Appointment

- Keep all follow-up appointments with your health care provider or specialist, even if you are feeling well.
- Follow up with your primary care provider if you have any other questions.
- For an emergency call 911 or have someone take you to the Emergency Room if you have chest pain, trouble breathing or shortness of breath.