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Olecranon ORIF

ELBOW FRACTURE FIXATION — POSTOPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS

Patient _____ **Surgery date** _____ **Side** ☐ Right ☐ Left

WHAT MATTERS MOST IN THE FIRST 6 WEEKS

- **Do not** push with this arm — no pushing up from a chair or bed, no walker or cane in this hand — for 6 weeks.
- **Do not** lift anything heavier than a cup of coffee with this arm for 6 weeks.
- Avoid leaning on the point of the elbow.
- **Do not smoke or use nicotine** — it significantly increases the risk the bone will not heal.

MEDICATION

Pain medication

Narcotic/opioid medications (oxycodone, hydrocodone) are habit-forming. If needed, you will receive a one-time prescription sized for your surgery. Most patients need them for only 2–3 days; taking them longer than 6 days significantly increases the risk of dependence. **Do not drive, drink alcohol, or make important decisions while taking them.**

Take 1–2 tablets every 4–6 hours as needed for pain.

☐ Oxycodone ☐ Percocet (oxycodone/acetaminophen) ☐ Norco (hydrocodone/acetaminophen)

☐ Other _____

Tylenol (acetaminophen)

☐ You may add Tylenol 325 mg, 2 tablets every 4–6 hours. Do not exceed 3,000 mg in 24 hours *from all sources*.

☐ Do NOT take extra Tylenol — your prescribed pain medication already contains acetaminophen.

Anti-inflammatories (NSAIDs: ibuprofen/Advil/Motrin, naproxen/Aleve, meloxicam/Mobic)

NSAIDs can slow tendon and bone healing and increase bleeding risk; they are approved only for specific patients.

☐ NSAIDs approved ☐ NSAIDs **NOT** approved

Blood clot prevention

☐ **Aspirin 81 mg once daily** for 4 weeks

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☐ Lovenox _____

☐ Continue your home blood thinner

☐ No blood clot medication needed for your procedure

Nausea & constipation

You have prescriptions for **Zofran** (nausea — fill only if you have severe nausea) and **Colace** (stool softener while taking narcotics). Walking, fluids, fiber, and prune juice also help; MiraLAX is OK if no bowel movement in 2–3 days.

Other: _____

ACTIVITY & HOME EXERCISES

Ice / cold therapy

☐ **Cooling unit:** use in 4-hour intervals with 30-minute breaks for the first 1–2 weeks, then as needed. Keep a layer between the pad and your skin. **Do NOT** leave on overnight.

☐ **Ice packs:** 20 minutes on / 20 minutes off as needed for the first 2 weeks. Ice works through thick bandages even if you can't feel the cold.

Do NOT use heat on the surgical area.

Nerve block: Your arm may be numb and heavy for 12–36 hours. Keep it supported in the sling or splint and protect it — you cannot feel heat, cold, or pressure. Start your pain medication in the evening, before the block wears off.

- **Fingers:** make a full fist and fully straighten your fingers 10 times every hour you are awake to reduce swelling and stiffness.
- Move the shoulder gently (shrugs and small circles) several times a day.
- Once the splint is removed, gentle bending and straightening of the elbow is encouraged as directed — the elbow stiffens easily.
- **Driving:** not while taking narcotics or wearing the splint. Typically 2–6 weeks.
- **Work:** one-handed desk work often in 1–2 weeks.

RESTRICTIONS

Weeks 0–6	No pushing, no weight through the arm, no lifting more than 1 lb, no resisted straightening of the elbow.
Weeks 6–12	Gradual strengthening as the bone heals.
3 months+	Full activity when cleared.

SPLINT & SLING

☐ Splint on until your first post-op visit, then begin elbow motion.

☐ Soft dressing only — begin gentle elbow motion now.

☐ Sling for comfort only, as needed.

BONE HEALING

- Broken bones typically take **6–12 weeks** to heal. The plate and screws hold the bone in place while it heals, but cannot replace healing bone — follow your restrictions even if you feel well.
- **Do not smoke or use nicotine** (including vapes and patches). Nicotine significantly increases the risk that the bone will not heal.
- Eat a balanced diet with adequate protein, calcium, and vitamin D.
- The plate and screws usually stay in permanently. If they become bothersome after the bone heals, they can be removed.

CALL US IF

- You develop new or worsening numbness or tingling in the ring and small fingers.

SHOWERING & DRESSING CARE

Showering

- You may shower **2 days after surgery**. Let soapy water run over the incision; do not scrub it. Pat dry.
- **No baths, pools, or hot tubs** for 3 weeks, and until the incision is fully healed.

Dressing

☐ **Waterproof dressing (e.g., Aquacel):** you may shower over it. Leave on for **7 days**, then remove and cover the incision with a dry dressing or leave it open if dry.

☐ **Gauze dressing:** keep it dry. Remove at **7 days** and apply a new dry dressing.

- Some light bloody drainage is normal. Leave steri-strips or skin glue in place.
- No lotions, ointments, or creams on the incision.

PROCEDURES PERFORMED

☐ Open reduction internal fixation of the olecranon: ☐ plate and screws ☐ tension band wiring

☐ Bone graft

☐ Other: _____

DIET

- Eat lightly the day of surgery, then advance to your regular diet. Drink plenty of non-alcoholic, caffeine-free fluids.
- A well-balanced, protein-rich diet supports healing. Avoid new supplements in the early recovery period unless cleared by your surgeon.
- If you have diabetes, check your blood sugar more often — surgery and steroids given during anesthesia can raise it.

PHYSICAL THERAPY

☐ You have been given a physical therapy prescription and protocol (in your post-op packet). Call a convenient location to schedule — therapy should begin within **7–10 days**. Bring the prescription and protocol to your first visit.

☐ You will NOT start therapy before your first post-op visit. You will receive PT instructions at that visit.

FOLLOW-UP

Your first post-operative appointment: **Date** _____ **Time** _____ **Location** _____

- To change your post-operative visit, call **469.800.7200**.
- Pain medication refills: call Monday–Friday, 8:30 am–3:00 pm. Allow 24–48 hours. Narcotic refills are not available after hours or on weekends.

WHEN TO CALL US — 469.800.7200, DAY OR NIGHT

- Fever over 101.5°F, or chills
- Redness spreading from the incision, red streaks, foul odor, or drainage that keeps increasing after day 3
- Calf pain, tenderness, or swelling
- Pain or swelling not relieved by your medication, ice, and elevation
- Hand or fingers that is cold, pale, or blue, or numbness/weakness that is worsening (mild numbness around the incisions is expected)
- Bleeding that soaks through the dressing

If you cannot reach the on-call surgeon promptly and you are concerned, go to the nearest Emergency Room.

CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY FOR CHEST PAIN OR SHORTNESS OF BREATH.

SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS

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Please read these instructions carefully before calling the office — most common questions are answered here. Thank you!