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ORTHOPEDIC ASSOCIATES OF DALLAS
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Proximal Humerus ORIF

SHOULDER FRACTURE FIXATION — POSTOPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS

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

WHAT MATTERS MOST IN THE FIRST 6 WEEKS

- Wear the sling at all times, including sleep, for **4 weeks**, except for hygiene, dressing, and exercises.
- **Do not** actively lift the arm away from your body or lift any objects with this arm for 6 weeks.
- Do not push yourself up from a bed or chair with this arm.
- **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 in the sling and protect it — you cannot feel heat, cold, or pressure. Start your pain medication in the evening, before the block wears off. Mild shortness of breath or hoarseness on the first day can occur; **call 911 for significant trouble breathing.**

- **Fingers, wrist, and elbow:** make a full fist and fully straighten your fingers 10 times every hour you are awake to reduce swelling and stiffness. Bend and straighten the wrist and elbow 10 times each hour as well.
- **Pendulums** (lean forward, let the arm hang, gently swing in small circles) 1–2 minutes, 3 times a day, unless told otherwise.
- Place a pillow behind the elbow when lying down. Many patients sleep better in a recliner or propped up for the first few weeks.
- To wash under the arm or dress, lean forward and let the arm hang gently — do not lift it with your shoulder muscles.
- Dress the operated arm first and undress it last. Loose button-up shirts are easiest.
- Bruising that spreads down the arm to the elbow and forearm over the first 1–2 weeks is common.
- **Driving:** not while taking narcotics or wearing the sling. Typically about 6 weeks.

RESTRICTIONS

Weeks 0–6	Passive motion only (therapist or pendulums). No active lifting of the arm. No lifting objects.
Weeks 6–12	Active motion and light use as the fracture heals, as directed.
3 months+	Strengthening once the bone has healed.

SLING

☐ Sling at all times, including sleep, for **4 weeks**. Remove for hygiene, dressing, and exercises.

☐ Other: _____

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.

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 (plate and screws) of the proximal humerus

☐ Bone graft / augmentation
☐ Rotator cuff repair
☐ 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!