

DISCHARGE INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS AFTER HAND SURGERY

If you have had:

- **Local anaesthetic only:** (an injection at or near the site of the incision, usually performed by the surgeon in theatre)
 - The numbness may last for several hours.
- **General anaesthesia** (being fully unconscious throughout the operation) or
- **sedation** (being sleepy but still conscious and able to communicate)

You may not be able to think clearly afterwards. For at least 24 hours, you must not:

- Be in charge of children or other adults
- Drive a vehicle or ride a bicycle
- Cook or use any machinery
- Make any important decisions or sign any legal documents
- Drink alcohol

Some people might not feel fully alert even after 24 hours. Do not undertake these activities until you feel fully alert and competent to do so.

- **Regional anaesthesia (nerve block)** (an injection around the collar bone or arm pit to make the arm numb and weak, performed by an anaesthetist just before the surgery)
 - If you have a sling, keep this on until you have regained full control of your hand.
 - For further specific information, please see the leaflet titled "*Nerve blocks for surgery on the shoulder, arm or hand*" which the nurses have provided you with.

Advice about pain:

This is usually mild, and is generally well controlled with simple pain killers. The nurses will make sure you have these available before discharging you. If these medications are insufficient, please contact your pharmacy or GP.

Advice about dressings:

You may have a full bandage from knuckle to elbow, or another type of dressing. Please try to keep these clean and dry until you are seen at the Dressings Clinic, for which an appointment will be made for you before you leave the hospital.

"Steristrips" may have been applied to your wound. These are small sticky paper tapes which should be left in place until you have been seen in the clinic.

Once the stitches are removed and the wound is healed, you may be advised to gently massage cream (such as Nivea, E45, or vitamin E) into the scar.

Advice about slings:

You may need to wear a sling to keep your hand elevated to prevent swelling and discomfort.

You can expect to wear the sling for anywhere from 2 to 5 days.

Unless you have had a nerve block, we advise that you exercise your shoulder and elbow with your arm out of the sling every hour to regularly move your fingers. When sitting you may remove your sling and support your hand on pillows. If you have had a nerve block, you must not attempt this until the feeling and strength has returned to the arm. This might take 24 – 48 hours.

Advice about splints:

The splint is to maintain the correct position of your hand.

The splint should be worn at all times and kept clean and dry.

DO NOT REMOVE YOUR SPLINT.

Advice about plaster casts:

This refers to both a full plaster and a backslab (half plaster).

The plaster is not fully dry for 24 hours and should be treated with care.

Do not attempt to dry the wet plaster by heat or in front of a fire.

Do not get the plaster wet.

Do not cut or interfere with the plaster.

Exercise those joints not included in the plaster, e.g. shoulder, fingers, elbow.

Contact us if you experience new pain, tingling or numbness in the hand or fingers.

Report urgently to the Plastics Dressings Unit or an Urgent Care Centre if:

- The plaster cracks, becomes loose or otherwise uncomfortable
- There is any pain or soreness that is not eased by elevating the arm
- There is any discharge
- Fingers become numb or difficult to move
- Fingers become swollen, blue or white

How to contact us:

For help with wound care, dressings and for wound review appointments, contact the Dressings Unit on 0191 2824339.

If you have a problem following your operation or you need advice about something else, you should contact the hand unit (ward 39) on 0191 2826039 (8am – 8pm Monday – Friday only).

If you need advice outside of these hours, contact ward 47 on 0191 2825647.

Feedback

We would appreciate feedback on your experience of the RVI hand surgery unit. Please visit www.nusgra.co.uk where you can also find detailed information about the hand surgery unit, and access other electronic patient resources.