



# Elbow Contracture Release

## Patient Postoperative Instructions

### Laith Al-Shihabi, MD

#### Day of Surgery

##### Pain medication:

- An anesthetic block will be in place to your arm for pain control.
- Additional pain medications, if necessary, can be given by your nurse.

##### Post-op Dressings:

- Dressings will be kept in place during your hospital stay.
- Elevation of the arm, along with ice on-and-off for 20 minutes at a time, will help with swelling and pain.
- You may find it easier to sleep in a reclined position rather than flat to help support your elbow.

##### Motion:

- Start moving your fingers as soon as possible.
- You will start passive elbow motion on the day of surgery using a continuous passive motion (CPM) machine. This will be done while your arm is numb to maintain motion, then will also be used at home for 1 month after surgery.
- On the day after surgery, you will be seen by an occupational therapist to demonstrate range-of motion exercises.
- You will be instructed on unweighted motion exercises and weighted stretches using a 2 lb. weight before discharge.

#### 0-1 week

##### Pain medication:

- Use your prescription pain medication as needed to control pain.
- Do not drive or operate machinery while taking narcotic/opioid pain medication.
- Unless you cannot take them for other medical reasons, you will be given a prescription anti-inflammatory to help with both pain and reduce the risk of post-surgical bone formation around the elbow. This will be used for 2 weeks after surgery.

##### Post-op Dressings:

- Keep the dressings and splint in place until your therapy visit.
- It is ok to shower, but the dressings must stay clean and dry. Place a waterproof covering over the dressings while bathing or showering (such as a large heavy plastic bag that is sealed with Saran wrap).
- If the dressings get dirty, wet, or come apart please contact the office to have the dressing re-done.

##### Motion:

- You should start hand therapy visits within 3 days of your surgery.

## **1-2 (First therapy visit)**

### Splint:

-You will be fitted for static-progressive splints to help stretch the elbow. These should be worn for 30 minutes each morning and each evening and gradually increased to stretch the elbow.

### Motion:

-Therapy will be started for elbow, wrist, and hand motion. Therapy should be scheduled for 3-5 times per week, especially for the first 6 weeks.  
-You should also perform exercises at home at least 3 additional times per day for 10-15 minutes per session. If you can do more that is better.  
-Continue to avoid lifting, carrying, pushing, or pulling anything heavier than a glass of water.

## **2-6 weeks (First post-op visit)**

### Splint:

-The sutures will be removed at your first postoperative visit.  
-Continue use of the static-progressive splints.  
-Scar massage can be started at 3 weeks post-op.

### Motion:

-Continue motion and stretching exercises with your therapist.

## **6 -10 weeks (Second post-op visit)**

### Splint:

-Continue with use of the static-progressive splint.

### Motion:

-Continue elbow motion and stretching exercises.

## **10-12 weeks (Third post-op visit)**

### Splint:

-Continue with use of the static-progressive splint as needed for up to 3-4 months.

### Motion:

-You can begin to incorporate gentle strengthening into therapy.  
-Transition to a home therapy program around 12 weeks after surgery.

## **12+ weeks (Fourth post-op visit)**

Gradually return to light activity and exercise. There are no further activity restrictions at this time. No further therapy is necessary after 3-4 months unless required on a case-by-case basis.