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If You Have Concerns

If you have concerns or questions, please read the following information before calling the office. You will find most of your answers here.

What if my extremity swells after surgery?

It is common to experience swelling after surgery. Sometimes you will not swell until several days after your surgery. Remember that your body is healing from the surgery, and that the swelling is part of the healing process. The more activities and physical therapy you perform, the more swelling you may experience.

It is important that you participate in the therapy that Dr. Beamer prescribes for you. There are several things you can do to help reduce swelling.

- ✓ **Rest:** Do not overexert yourself after surgery. Plan to spend some time on the couch or in bed for the first several days after surgery.
- ✓ **Ice:** Ice your extremity 4-5 times a day for 20 minutes after surgery. You may have a custom ice machine. Alternatively, a bag of ice or frozen peas will work. Make sure you put a towel or piece of cloth between the ice and your skin to prevent frost bite.
- ✓ **Compression:** Some surgical areas may be wrapped with an ace wrap. This is more difficult in some areas (like the shoulder). The ace wrap should be snug, but not so tight that it restricts blood flow. If you are notice increasing numbness or pain from the Ace Wrap, loosen or remove it.
- ✓ **Elevation:** By elevating your extremity, you will help the blood flow away from the operative site.
 - For the leg, you want to keep the operative site just above the level of your heart (usually 3-6 inches).
 - It is hard to elevate your shoulder. You may find that sitting up while sleeping will help with swelling. You should NOT take your arm out of the sling to elevate your hand. Perform your hand, wrist and elbow exercise to assist with swelling reduction.

Will I have bruising after surgery?

Yes. While everyone is different, you will have some degrees of bruising. Sometimes this bruising can extend down the length of your entire extremity. This will resolve with time. You may notice some redness around the incision. This can be normal, provided there isn't excessive drainage or increasing pain. If you are having fevers or wound drainage, call the office as this may be a sign of an infection.

What should I expect my activity level to be?

Every patient is different. You will have good days and bad days, but overall your activity should improve from week to week. Let your pain level and swelling be your guide to your activity. You will make 90 percent of your recovery in the first 3 months after surgery, but most patients require *at least one year* to achieve full recovery.

At some point, most patients overdo their activities and therefore take a few steps back in their recovery. You may have increased swelling or discomfort if this happens. You should contact the office if your pain becomes uncontrollable with rest and medication.

What if I am having problems sleeping?

Make sure that your pain is well controlled throughout the day. It may be helpful to time your medication so that you take it right before you sleep. Do not take too many naps during the day.

When can I shower or bathe?

Unless told otherwise, you may shower 3 days (72 hours) after surgery. You may remove your dressing and let clean water run over your incisions. **DO NOT LET YOUR INCISION SOAK UNDERWATER**, so no hot tubs, bath, lakes, oceans, etc. Make sure you pat your skin dry and replace the dressing with clean gauze. For arthroscopy patients you may see external sutures and can place Band-Aids over your stitches instead of gauze. You may shower normally after your sutures have been removed, usually at 10-14 days. Often the Steri-Strips that were over your wound may fall off in the shower. They do not need to be replaced.

Do not submerge your incision under water (ie bath or swimming pool) until the wound has fully healed. This is usually around 4 weeks.

How long do I have to wear the sling (shoulder patients)?

This depends on your surgery. Times may range from a few days to 6 weeks.

What positions can I sleep in?

You should sleep on your back (knee surgery patients) or in an upright seated position (such as a recliner) for shoulder surgery patients. Many patients find that a recliner helps with their pain control, especially for shoulder surgery patients. For shoulder patients, *you must remain in your sling while you sleep*.

When can I restart the medications I was told to stop prior to surgery?

This depends on your medication history and the medications you were on. Please consult your primary care physician.

How long will I be on narcotic medication for?

You can stop taking the narcotic pain medication (Vicodin, Norco, Percocet, Oxycontin) once you are no longer experiencing pain or your pain is controlled by other medications. The majority of patients have stopped taking narcotics after 1-2 weeks. Many narcotics also contain Acetaminophen (Tylenol). It is okay to take Advil or other NSAID with narcotics, but do not take additional Tylenol as it may cause liver toxicity.

Once you have stopped taking narcotic medication, it is okay to take Tylenol with your NSAID.

What should I do to avoid constipation?

Drink plenty of fluids and eat fruits and fiber. If you continue to have symptoms of constipation, you can take Milk of Magnesia, Magnesium Citrate, Senekot, Dulcolax or Colace. These medications are available over the counter at your pharmacy.

What about a hot tub or whirlpool?

Do not use a hot tub or whirlpool until your incision has fully healed. We recommend waiting at least 4 weeks prior to using a hot tub or whirlpool after any surgery. There are bacteria that could cause an infection, so use extra precaution.

When to call:

- Fever above 101.5 consistently
- Increased drainage or swelling
- Pain not controlled by pain medication
- Uncontrolled nausea and/or vomiting
- Swelling that is accompanied by coolness or decreased sensation in the arm or hand