



# *Post Operative Instructions: AC Joint Reconstruction*

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## **ACTIVITY/SLING**

- Keep your sling on at all times for 6 weeks.
  - Do not reach out (forward or to the side), up, or behind you. Keep your elbow tucked into your side at all times.
  - No weight bearing with your operative arm for 6 weeks.
  - Do not push, pull, lift, carry, or climb with the operative arm.
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## **NERVE BLOCK**

- If you had a nerve block, you may experience the sensation of not being able to take a full, deep breath. This is because the nerve block often "numbs up" the nerve going to the half of the diaphragm on the operative side. Don't worry! You will still be able to breathe just fine, as you still have the other half of the diaphragm and all the rib muscles working normally.
  - Most blocks will last anywhere from 24-72 hours. It is also normal to feel numbness or weakness in the hand or forearm during this time.
  - If you find that you can't catch your breath or are working too hard to breathe, then obviously let us know or return to the emergency department.
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## **DRESSING & INCISIONS**

- A small amount of red-tinged drainage on the dressing during the first 2 days is normal.
  - Keep the dressing clean and dry; protect it while bathing or showering.
  - Remove the dressing 4 days after surgery.
  - You may apply Band-Aids to the incisions or leave them open to air.
  - Do not apply Bacitracin or other ointments.
  - Avoid soaking in pools, lakes, hot tubs, or the ocean until sutures are removed and the incision is fully healed.
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## **PAIN & INFLAMMATION**

### Ice

- Apply ice wrapped in a dry towel 20 minutes at a time, several times per day for the first week, then as needed.

### Elevation

- It is normal for your shoulder to be swollen from the fluid used during surgery. Your forearm and hand may become swollen in the days following surgery. Gravity pulls swelling down to your hand.

### Pain Medications

- Take your prescribed medications as directed.  
Tylenol (Acetaminophen)

- First-line for pain.
- Take 1000 mg every 6–8 hours.
- Do not exceed 1000 mg per dose or 4000 mg per day (limit to 3000 mg/day if you have liver issues).
- Do not drink alcohol while taking Tylenol.

#### Methocarbamol

- Helps with pain and muscle spasms.
- Take every 6 hours as needed.

#### Oxycodone

- For moderate to severe breakthrough pain only.
- Use sparingly and wean off as soon as possible.

#### Common side effects include:

- Nausea: Take with food.
- Drowsiness: Do not drive or operate machinery.
- Itching: Benadryl may help.
- Constipation:
  - Use stool softeners (e.g., Senna-Docusate) or OTC options (Mineral Oil, Milk of Magnesia, etc).
  - Avoid bananas, rice, apples, toast, and yogurt (may worsen constipation).
  - Light walking helps stimulate bowel function.

#### Refills:

- If you think you will need a refill, you must request it during regular weekday office hours.
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### **EMERGENCIES**

You must have someone stay with you during the first 48 hours after surgery.

Call the clinic or the on-call orthopedist if:

- Drainage soaks the dressing, increases, smells foul, or if incisions become red, warm, or very painful.
  - You develop a fever  $>101.5^{\circ}\text{F}$  or chills.
  - You experience leg or calf pain, swelling, or difficulty breathing.
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### **FOLLOW-UP CARE**

- Schedule a follow-up appointment at ~2 weeks postoperatively for a wound check, suture removal, and review of your surgery (if not already scheduled).
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## Exercises

- When you are comfortable and ready you may perform 1-2 sets of 10, 1-2 times a day of each of the following exercises
- **Grip strengthening:** With the arm in the sling, grip a rubber ball, old tennis ball, or beanbag. Hold for 5 seconds and release.
- **Shoulder Shrugs:**
  - Keep your arm close to your body.
  - Shrug your shoulders upwards and hold for 5 seconds.
  - Slowly lower your shoulders.
  - Repeat.
- **Shoulder Rows:**
  - Keep your arm close to your body.
  - Pull your shoulders forward by rounding your back. Hold for 5 seconds.
  - Slowly unround your back and stand normally.
  - Pull your shoulders back by trying to “pinch” your shoulder blades together. Hold for 5 seconds.
  - Repeat.

