

BASE OF THUMB ARTHRITIS AFTER CARE



MCRAE PLASTIC SURGERY

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After surgery, you will be in a bulky dressing (bandage) with a plaster splint that covers your thumb, wrist and forearm. The splint is similar to a cast. The splint cannot be removed and must be kept dry.

When showering or bathing, cover the splint and your hand with a plastic bag to keep everything dry. The splint protects the incision and the surgical reconstruction, as well as lessen swelling. Elevate your hand above your heart as much as possible to lessen swelling and pain. Pillows and blankets under the arm are helpful when you go to sleep.

Right after surgery, you may begin gentle finger exercises as your fingers and the tip of the thumb will be free. You will be unable to move the base of the thumb or your wrist because of the splint.

You can use your hand for very light activities of daily living, such as eating, writing, typing, getting dressed, and brushing your teeth. Avoid any heavy gripping, pulling, or pinching with the thumb until your surgeon or therapist says you may do these things.

Follow Up:

Follow up should be booked two weeks after surgery by calling the Martin center booking line at 416-864-5280.

At the 2-week post op visit: Your splint will be removed and a new removable plaster splint will be applied. You are encouraged to book an appointment with a hand therapist to have a custom removable brace made after this visit. You will wear this brace full time for the next 4 weeks. The brace may be removed for showering and gentle activities.

Gentle activities include: Moving the joint closest to the thumb finger-nail and moving the next joint more proximal at 1 month after surgery.

At the 6-week timepoint, you should begin more aggressive hand therapy, ideally twice per week to work on edema (swelling) control and range of motion. You can continue to wear the brace for activities

At the 3-month after surgery timepoint, you should no longer use the brace to support your thumb but some like to use a soft neoprene splint for support during activities. Strengthening exercises begin 3 months after thumb surgery.

Pain Management:

Thumb surgical reconstruction can be painful. You will receive a prescription for narcotic pain medicine.

You are encouraged to take Tylenol but must make sure you do not exceed the maximum dose of 4 grams (4000 mg) per day. 1000 mg three times a day is a safe dose assuming you are NOT taking Tylenol #3 as well.

Ibuprofen is another good non-narcotic pain option. If you are taking this for more than 3 days, you will also need a medication to protect your stomach such as omeprazole and this can be prescribed for you by your surgeon. 400-800 mg three times a day is generally safe in the immediate post-operative period.

For the first 2-3 days, take the pain medication around the clock to stay on top of the pain control. After 3 days, take the medicine only if you need it. It is important to know that even with pain medication, you can still experience some discomfort.

Recovery timeline:

The first 6 weeks are tough with pain, weakness, and stiffness in the thumb. By 3 months, operative pain most often resolves. At the 3 month mark, there are no activity restrictions though certain activities may be difficult to perform.

Your symptoms will continue to improve with improvements in ability to do more activities every 3 months.

Patient usually have good strength and motion at 6 months, and continue to improve for up to 1 year after surgery

Most patients have a significant decrease in their pain levels and are able to do more activities after thumb CMC joint arthroplasty surgery.

