

After Shoulder Arthroscopy

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After Shoulder Arthroscopy, I would like you to know what precautions you should take, and what to expect. This information sheet has been written to be broad enough to cover several situations; however, details of each may differ depending upon your individual surgery.

1) Pain Medication: In general, Arthroscopy is relatively non-invasive. This means that the discomfort you have after surgery will tend to be less than if the same surgery was performed with an open incision. In addition, full recovery is generally more rapid when surgery is performed with arthroscopic techniques. This does not mean that the procedure will be totally painless. To aid in pain relief, especially with procedures like capsular reconstruction or rotator cuff repair, a nerve block is used to improve comfort. This may make your arm numb and weak for more than 12 hours. Pain is minimized when little pain is present immediately after surgery. Patients usually take mild narcotics for the first week or two. After the first few days these should be used sparingly. This improves their effectiveness, and ensures that you will not become physically dependent. Usually, after the first week, little pain medicine is required except at night to aid with sleep. Sitting up at night initially, propped up with pillows or blankets will help your comfort. Your physician will give you enough pain medicine to last through your first post-op visit.

2) Wound Care: When simple arthroscopy has been performed, only small puncture sites are present, and your dressing may be removed after one or two days, with Band-Aids reapplied. Showering may occur on the fourth day after surgery. Prior to this, wash around the incision sites. When you shower, do not scrub the surgical area. Let the water runoff, blot the skin dry, and reapply Band-Aids. When you come to the office, your sutures will be removed, Steri-strips will be applied as reinforcement, and you can then treat the area without special consideration. Do not soak in a bath, pool or ocean until one week after your stitches are removed. If you have a longer incision, then the incision should be kept dry and clean until your sutures are removed. Then the incision site may be washed or showered. This is a precaution against wound contamination from skin bacteria (the most common cause of peri-operative infection).

3) Swelling: and bruising is common in the upper arm to the elbow level from blood which tracks from the shoulder area towards the elbow. This may appear as late as a week after surgery.

4) Physical Therapy: Motion of the extremity is important for early return to normal function. Rapid return of motion is important to functional recovery. This should be done immediately after simple arthroscopic decompression, but motion and strengthening should be supervised by a Physical Therapist when capsular, or rotator cuff reconstruction has been performed. Please make these arrangements so that therapy begins soon after surgery to minimize stiffness.

5) Contact me: If you develop increasing pain, or fever above 101.5, please contact the office.

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