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Post-Operative Instructions: Distal Radius ORIF Hand Therapy Department

Introduction

You have been provided this sheet as you have had surgery to fix the fracture of your radius bone. Initially your hand and wrist are likely to be quite swollen and uncomfortable to move but we hope this sheet provides you with the information you need to regain the best functional use of your hand.

Protection

Initially you will have a bulky dressing on your arm but when this is reduced, you may be provided with a wrist splint. It is acceptable to wear the splint initially for comfort and pain relief however, it is advised not to wear it all the time.

If you haven't been provided a splint, don't worry, you probably don't need one! Start trying to use your hand/wrist in light activities as it is comfortable to do so. Having had this surgery, you have been given a head start to use it.



Swelling

Swelling in days immediately following surgery is quite common and is a part of the healing process, however, the following techniques would help resolve it sooner –

Elevation

It is likely you have been provided with a sling to elevate your hand and wrist. It is okay to use this initially as it will offer you some form of protection as you leave the hospital. However, it is important not to become reliant upon this as it can make your elbow stiff. Elevation can also be achieved by resting your hand on the opposite shoulder or up on pillows when you are resting. The important thing to remember is to not let your hand hang down!

Active Movement

Active movement can assist the vessels that control swelling to work properly. Simply, try making a fist repeatedly with your hand in elevation or try the active tendon gliding exercises mentioned at the next page to reduce swelling.

Massage

Massage for management of swelling should be completed with your hand in elevation and with downward

strokes starting at the tips of your fingers, moving onto your hand and then your wrist and forearm. This can assist with the flow of fluid away from the limb.

Exercises

Here are some exercises to try. It is important to gradually build up exercises like these to encourage your movement to improve. It is **acceptable** to feel a stretchy / achy type of pain, this is normal. This is where the soft tissues that move you have become tight. Be cautious if you feel a shooting pain, you may have taken the exercise a bit too far. Try completing them around 3-4 times a day. Repeating each one 5 times and building up to 10 times. It is important to hold each move when you feel discomfort for a prolonged gentle stretch.

- 1) Tendon gliding exercises -Complete as a sequence. Hold each position for 10 seconds.



- 2) Start by touching the thumb to the base of the index finger; slide the thumb up to the tip of the index then across each fingertip to the little finger. Then run your thumb down the little finger and onto the palm as far as you can. Make sure the tip of the thumb is bending. Hold for 10 seconds.

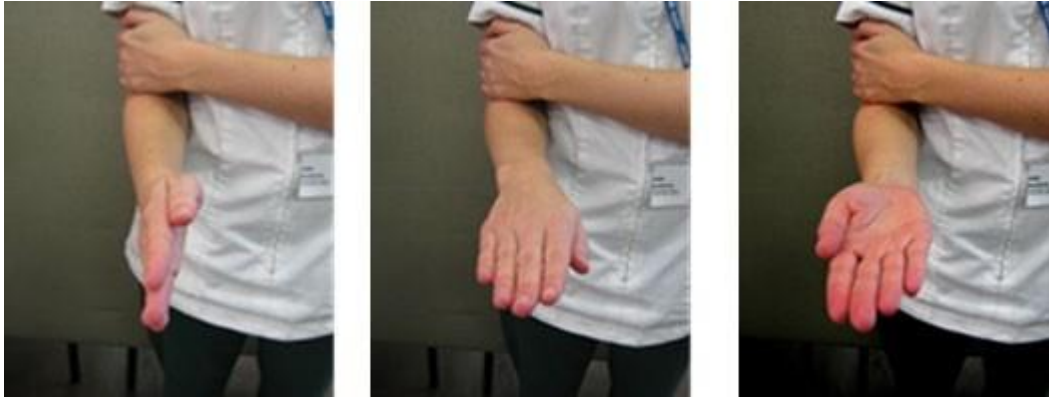


- 3) Rest your forearm on the arm of a chair or a table with your wrist over the edge. Keeping your elbow on the surface, gently bend at your wrist and hold. Then gently lift your hand up to bend your wrist back and hold.



- 4) With your forearm on a flat surface and your other hand preventing it from moving, wave your whole hand from the wrist to one side and hold. Then wave towards the other side and hold.

5) With your elbow bent at 90° and tucked into side; turn you palm down to the floor and hold. Then turn you palm up to the ceiling and hold.



Scar

Once the wound has healed and the sutures are removed or dissolved you will have a scar present. Scar tissue is unlike normal tissue and can stick to the structures around it. They can also feel sensitive and strange to touch. This is normal because scars are new tissue where the nerve endings are just becoming established.

It is advised that you massage the scar in a firm circular motion to move and loosen it and the underlying tissues and to overcome any sensitivity. You can choose to use any non-perfumed hand cream, olive oil or Bio-Oil to assist. Complete 5-10 minutes at a time, 2-3 times a day.

The Use of Hot / Cold

Heat

Warming you hand and wrist can help loosen the soft tissues that move you. It can be beneficial to do this before completing your exercises as you will get more from them. This can be done by using a basin of warm water (providing the wound is healed) or a wheat bag that goes in the microwave. It is not advisable to use heat alone if you have a lot of swelling.

Contrast Bathing

The combination of hot and cold can be beneficial particularly if your swelling is persisting or you have unusual sensations. Only complete this when your wound is healed. Fill two bowls of water, one bath water temperature the other as cold as your tap will run. Start and finish with the hot for comfort. Place you forearm in the water up to your elbow if possible, you can gently make a fist or squeeze a soft sponge while you are in the water. Alternate between the two, staying in each one 3-4 minute