

# After Your Scaphoid Fractures and Non-unions Surgery

## Self-care and follow-up

*This handout explains follow-up care after surgery to repair scaphoid fractures and non-unions.*

**If your incisions are red or there is drainage coming from them, call us right away at the phone numbers listed on the next page. Go to the emergency room if this occurs at night or on a weekend.**

### Wound Care

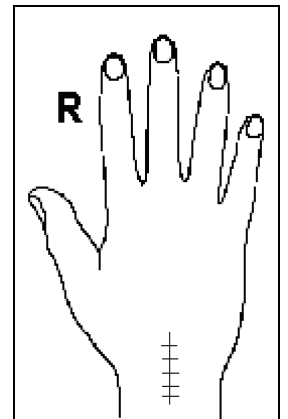
- After surgery, your arm will likely have a bulky *dressing* (bandage) on it and be in a short plaster splint. The cast will cover your wrist and thumb, but the tip of your thumb will be exposed.

### Pain Management

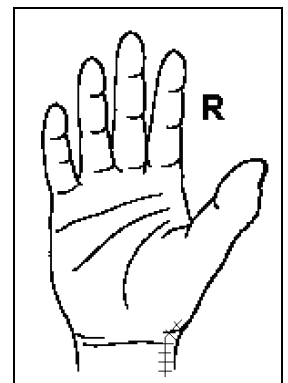
- You will receive a prescription for narcotic pain medicine. Take this medicine only if you need it.
- Be sure to talk with the clinic nurse about how to take your pain medicine. To best manage your pain, you must take your pain medicine the way it was prescribed. Taking the correct dose at the right time is very important.
- If you have uncomfortable side effects from the pain medicine, call the nurse at 206-598-4263.
- Please see “Medications After Surgery” for more instructions.

### Driving

- Do **not** drive if you are taking narcotic pain medicine. It is not safe. The medicine can make you sleepy and delay your reaction time.
- Once you are no longer taking the medicine, you may drive as soon as you can comfortably grip the steering wheel with both hands.



*Incision site on the back of a right hand*



*Incision site on the front of a right hand*

## Activity

- Keep your arm elevated to reduce swelling.
- You may begin exercising your fingers gently after surgery. Try to bend and straighten your fingers as much as the dressing will allow.
- Because you won't be using your arm for your everyday activities, also exercise your shoulder several times a day by raising your arm overhead. This will help lessen stiffness in your shoulder.

## Follow-up

When you leave the surgery center, you should have a follow-up appointment in the Hand Center already set for 10 to 14 days after surgery. At this visit:

- Your sutures will be removed.
- Depending on your injury, your hand or arm will be placed in a fiberglass cast that includes the thumb and wrist (*thumb-spica* cast) or a removable brace.

The fiberglass cast is left in place for 4 weeks. At that point:

- X-rays will be taken to see how well the bone is healing. Some patients will need to wear a cast for at least 1 more month. Your doctor will decide if you need another cast or a brace.
- If you have a non-union (old injury) you will need to wear a short-arm thumb-spica cast for 4 to 6 more weeks.
- Scaphoid fractures may take longer to heal because of poor blood supply to the bone. For patients with scaphoid non-unions, we often prescribe a *bone stimulator* to help the bone heal. This device straps onto the cast and is worn at night. We must get approval from your insurance company before ordering this device for you.
- After your cast is removed, your hand or arm will be placed into a removable brace. You may also be referred to a hand therapist to begin wrist exercises.

## Results

Scaphoid fractures and non-unions are very critical injuries. If your fracture does not heal, there is a risk of developing arthritis. By using both *internal fixation* and *bone grafting* (for non-unions), most patients recover almost full motion and strength. It may take 6 to 12 months after the first surgery for this amount of recovery to occur.

### Questions or concerns?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Weekdays, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.: Call the Hand Center at **206-598-4263**.

After office hours and on weekends and holidays: Call the hospital operator at **206-598-6190**. Ask for the Hand Fellow on call to be paged. Your call will be returned.

For more information, please visit the Hand Center online at [www.uwhand.com](http://www.uwhand.com).