

What to Expect After Thumb Arthritis Surgery

The goal of this surgery is to relieve the pain at the base of your thumb. In addition to pain relief, patients typically report improvements in function and strength. However, gains in strength are slow going, and patients often report that they are still getting stronger even a year after surgery.

Activity:

After surgery your thumb will be immobilized in a splint for about 6 weeks (a non-removable splint will be worn for the first 10 days, and then a lighter removable splint for the remainder of the 6 weeks that can be taken off to shower and wash your hands). Your other fingers will be free, and you will be encouraged to move your other fingers after the surgery. You will be able to perform light activity with your hand immediately after surgery, including some typing and tablet activities. However, your thumb will not be used for these activities and you will not be able to lift anything heavy with your operative hand for ~6 weeks after surgery.

Logistics:

This is an outpatient surgery, and you will go home the same day. The surgery is typically performed using a regional nerve block, which means that the anesthesiologist will numb up your arm to minimize post-operative pain and intra-operative medication requirements. Patients are typically sedated during surgery, and the anesthesiologist will protect your airway and monitor you closely. Occasionally, general anesthesia is used as an alternative. Dr. Kitay's office will help coordinate any pre-operative testing that you need to ensure it is safe for you to undergo anesthesia. You will need to fast prior to surgery (nothing to eat or drink after midnight the night before surgery). Someone over the age of 18 will need to drive you home after surgery.

Pain control:

You will be given a prescription for narcotic pain medication. Please feel free to come to the office before surgery to get your prescription so that you can fill it at the pharmacy before the day of surgery.

Bathing:

You will go home with a splint on your hand that should stay clean and dry until you see Dr. Kitay at 7-10 days after surgery. It will need to be covered and kept out of the water while bathing. About 10 days after surgery, you will go into a removable splint that can be taken off for bathing (but will otherwise be worn like a cast until 6 weeks after the date of your surgery).

Follow up:

You will follow up with Dr. Kitay about 10 days after surgery. You should pre-arrange this appointment when you schedule your surgery. You will also need to see the occupational therapist (OT), who will make a splint for your thumb. With the exception of your first OT visit at 10 days after surgery for your

splint, no formal therapy is required until about 6 weeks after surgery. At that point, the therapist will work with you to help you regain your motion and strength.

Helpful Phone Numbers:

Nancy/Jackie (surgical scheduling): _____

Summit Occupational Therapy: _____

NRH Occupational Therapy: 301-260-3280 (Olney, MD); 301-986-4745 (Chevy Chase, MD)

Dr. Kitay's main office number: _____ (fax: _____)