

What to Expect After Carpal Tunnel Surgery

The goal of carpal tunnel surgery is to open up the “roof” of the carpal tunnel to relieve pressure on the median nerve. Patients with intermittent symptoms from mild to moderate carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) can expect the burning pain and tingling that often wakes them at night to improve shortly after surgery. Patients with more severe CTS will have less predictable recovery of numbness and weakness from long-standing nerve compression (ie- only time will tell how much recovery these patients will get). Our goal is to relieve the pressure on the nerve by performing surgery before irreversible nerve damage occurs.

Activity:

The more you rest in the first few days after surgery, the less bleeding, swelling, and scar tissue you will form and the better you will do. After the first few days, you will be able to perform light activity with your hand as long as it does not cause pain (such as typing, writing, and eating with your hand). You should be off of all pain medication (including ibuprofen and tylenol) before you start really using your hand, and you will gradually progress to more activity as pain allows (but no heavy lifting is allowed for 4-6 weeks after surgery).

Logistics:

There are two types of anesthesia for this surgery: local vs twilight anesthesia. If you choose local anesthesia, you will feel a pinch and a sting for a few seconds as Dr. Kitay numbs up your hand with lidocaine prior to the surgery. During the surgery, you should not feel pain but it is normal to feel some pressure. You will be awake during the surgery, but you will not see the surgery. Since you will not have any sedation, you will be able to eat and drink the day of surgery (and you won't need preoperative blood work or a medical clearance appointment). While it is always a good idea to have someone take you home when you have hand surgery, it is not a strict rule to have someone drive you home after local anesthesia.

If you prefer to have twilight sedation for the surgery, an IV will be placed the day of surgery and you will be given medication through the IV that will help you take a quick nap during the surgery. You will not be awake for the pinch and the sting of the numbing medication. The sedation is light, and you will still be breathing on your own during the surgery. Because of the sedation, 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 must take you home after surgery. You may also require preoperative blood work and medical clearance to ensure it is safe for you to undergo anesthesia.

Pain control:

Most patients only have mild pain after this surgery that is well controlled by over the counter medications (ie- Advil, Motrin, Tylenol, or Aleve). If over the counter medications do not control your pain, you are probably doing too much and need to rest more. You may also be given a small

prescription for narcotic pain medication in case you need something stronger for the first few days after surgery.

Bathing:

You will go home with a soft bandage on your hand that should stay clean and dry for 3 days after surgery. On the 4th day after surgery, you make take the soft bandage off. If there are steri strips and surgical glue, please do not remove these white strips or pick at the glue. At this point, your wound can get wet while washing your hands and showering (but please don't scrub the area). Once your bandage is removed, you can cover your wound with a band aid when you are out of the house. Please do not soak your wound (no bath tubs, no pools, no hot tubs, no doing dishes). Please do not scrub your wound, and please do not put any lotions or ointments on the wound until after you follow up with Dr. Kitay.

Follow up:

You will follow up with Dr. Kitay about 10-14 days after surgery. During that appointment, she will check your wound and check your range of motion. It is common to have some mild discomfort in the area of your palm for a few months after surgery. Dr. Kitay will teach you how to massage the scar tissue under your wound after it is healed to help with this problem.