



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF HAND THERAPISTS™

PATIENT EDUCATION RESOURCE

Helpful Tips When Preparing for Arm or Hand Surgery

“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”

Marybeth Ezaki, MD, Past President, American Society for Surgery of the Hand

What types of clothing are easiest to put on after surgery?

When using one arm to get dressed after surgery, loose fitting or elastic are often easiest to manage. A cast may not fit into a small sleeve, so a larger sized shirt or one with cuff buttons may be needed. A tank top with snaps sewn into the shoulder is helpful if shoulder motion is limited. Sports bras and camisoles may be simpler to put on. Slip-on shoes, flip-flops or Velcro-secured shoes are often easiest to wear.



A tank top with snaps sewn into the shoulder and Velcro-secured shoes as pictured are examples of clothing to wear following arm surgery.

What are ways to be more independent with self-care tasks after surgery?

Large trash bags can be used to cover non-waterproof casts during bathing activities. Handheld showerheads are easier to manipulate. Consider toiletries with easy pump tops, electric razors for shaving and having assistance with washing, drying and styling hair.

If it is possible, practice toileting tasks with the opposite hand in the weeks prior to surgery. Wipes and spray bottles can be purchased to improve cleanliness.

Thought should be given to what feminine hygiene products will be easiest to use. A washcloth put on the bottom of the sink can be used to scrub against for one-handed hand washing. Hand sanitizer can also improve cleanliness after using the restroom.



What other activities are important to consider after surgery?

Ask for easy-open tops at the pharmacy when medications are filled and store them in a safe place. An alternative is to ask family or friends to divide out medications into a weekly pill container.



Easy-open medication bottle

Pillows, extra blankets or surgical foam pillows can be used to position the arm or hand. Check with the surgeon to see if there are rules about sleeping positions. Sometimes the most comfortable position will be sitting up. Consider what furniture is available that will be comfortable and supportive enough to sleep on.

Prepare meals ahead of time and freeze them in small serving sizes to easily manage with one hand. These meals can be reheated as needed; however, thought must go into how hot items will be carried with one hand. An electric can opener and food processor may also be helpful.

Driving will likely be restricted, so consider pre-arranging transportation for doctor or therapy appointments. While riding as a passenger, be aware of movements of the car that can be painful.

What can a hand therapist do for me?

Recovering from an injury or surgery takes time and patience. While a hand therapist uses a variety of treatment approaches to assist with the return to normal arm or hand function after surgery, a hand therapist can also assist in preparing for surgery. A hand therapist will suggest different ways to perform daily routines and will be able to recommend adaptive equipment, which will improve everyday function and overall independence.

To locate a hand therapist in your area, visit the American Society of Hand Therapists at www.asht.org or call 856-380-6856.