

Broken Hand: Care Instructions

Your Care Instructions

A hand can break (fracture) during sports, a fall, or a car crash. The break may happen when your hand twists, is hit, or is used to protect you in a fall. Fractures can range from a small, hairline crack, to a bone or bones broken into two or more pieces. Your treatment depends on how bad the break is.

Your doctor may have put your hand in a brace, splint, or cast to allow it to heal or to keep it stable until you see another doctor. It may take weeks or months for your hand to heal. You can help it heal with some care at home.

You heal best when you take good care of yourself. Eat a variety of healthy foods, and don't smoke.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor or nurse call line if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

You have an important part in getting ready for your surgery. Planning ahead and getting your body healthy can make your hospital stay more comfortable. It also gets you home and helps you recover faster.

Plan Ahead

- **Plan a ride home.** Ask a family member or friend to bring you home after your hospital stay.
- **Plan for meals.** Good nutrition is important for your recovery, but cooking may be harder to do right after you get home. Prepare and freeze meals before your surgery or ask friends and family to help you cook or shop for groceries.
- **Get help with chores.** After you get home you may need help. For a short time after your surgery, you may be told to avoid certain physical activities. Plan ahead and arrange to have some help with chores after your surgery.
- **Buy gum or hard candies.** Chewing gum and sucking on hard candies may help get your bowels moving after surgery.

Be as healthy as possible

- **Be active.** Being active before surgery will make it easier for you to be active after surgery. If you're normally active, keep doing your regular activities up to the day of your surgery. If you aren't used to exercising, start slowly. You can start by going for 15 minute walks.
- **Eat healthy.** Eating healthy foods will give your body the nutrients it needs to prepare for and handle the surgery. Eat healthy foods and drink enough fluids in the weeks

before your surgery. Your healthcare team will tell you how long before surgery that you need to stop eating and drinking.

- **Manage your medical conditions.** If you have other medical conditions, such as anemia or high or low blood sugar, ask your healthcare team what you need to do to prepare for surgery.
- **Quit tobacco.** You can heal faster and prevent lung problems after surgery if you quit tobacco. Aim to quit smoking and using tobacco and tobacco-like products at least 4 weeks before surgery. Talk to your healthcare team about ways to quit or cut back. Visit AlbertaQuits.ca for helpful tips and support.
- **Don't drink alcohol 24 hours before surgery.** Alcohol, cannabis, and other drugs may interact with medicines you take before and after surgery. Talk to your healthcare team if you need help stopping or cutting back on alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs.

Do the following before your surgery to help you feel better sooner and recover faster.

The day before surgery

- Know the time of your surgery, when you need to be at the hospital, and where you need to go when you get there.
- Follow any instructions the healthcare team or your surgeon gave you for your medicines (including herbal or complementary medicines).
- Don't drink alcohol 24 hours before your surgery.



- **Stop eating 8 hours before surgery.** This is very important!

Carbohydrate Loading

Pre-surgical carbohydrate loading has been proven safe and an effective way of helping the body heal faster, and assisting in the prevention of post-operative infection.



Stop eating and drinking all non-clear fluids at midnight. This is very important

- You may **DRINK CLEAR FLUIDS ONLY** up to 3 hours before surgery. This includes **BLACK** coffee, tea, Gatorade, apple juice and water.

Morning of surgery

Plan to arrive at the hospital on time.

- Follow any instructions provided
- Bring all of the things you packed for your hospital stay **if** you are being admitted.
- Follow **all** other instructions the healthcare team gave you to prepare for surgery.
- Bring your CPAP if you use one



Discharge

How you may feel after your operation

- You may feel nauseated, light headed dizzy or sleepy for up to 24 hours after your surgery
- You may have a slight temperature for 2 days
- You may feel tired for a few days after your surgery

For 24 hours after your surgery do not....

- Drive a vehicle
- Operate heavy equipment
- Drink alcohol or smoke
- Make any important or legal decisions

How can you care for yourself at home?

- Put ice or a cold pack on your hand for 10 to 20 minutes at a time. Try to do this every 1 to 2 hours for the next 3 days (when you are awake). Put a thin cloth between the ice and your cast or splint. Keep your cast or splint dry.
- Follow the cast care instructions your doctor gives you. If you have a splint, do not take it off unless your doctor tells you to.
- Take pain medicines exactly as directed.
 - If the doctor gave you a prescription medicine for pain, take it as prescribed.
 - If you are not taking a prescription pain medicine, ask your doctor if you can take an over-the-counter medicine.
- Prop up your hand on pillows when you sit or lie down in the first few days after the injury. Keep your hand higher than the level of your heart. This will help reduce swelling.
- Follow instructions for exercises to keep your arm strong.

Wiggle your uninjured fingers often to reduce swelling and stiffness, but do not use that hand to grasp or carry anything.



Diet

- Start of light with foods such as soup, toast and tea. Avoid dairy and fatty foods as this might cause stomach upset.



Medicines

- Your doctor will tell you if and when you can restart your medicines. He or she will also give you instructions about taking any new medicines.
- If you take aspirin or some other blood thinner, ask your doctor if and when to start taking it again. Make sure that you understand exactly what your doctor wants you to do.
- If your doctor prescribed antibiotics, take them as directed. Do not stop taking them just because you feel better. You need to take the full course of antibiotics.



Incision care

- Follow our cast care instructions
- If you had stitches, your doctor will tell you when to come back to have them removed.



Exercise

- Hand rehabilitation is a series of exercises you do after your surgery. This helps you improve your range of motion and strength. You will work with your doctor and physiotherapist to plan this exercise program. To get the best results, you need to do the exercises correctly and as often and as long as your doctor tells you.



Ice and elevation

- Elevate your hand using the splint and support your arm on a pillow
- Ice it or anytime you sit or lie down during the next 5 days. Try to keep it above the level of your heart. This will help reduce swelling. Ice 20 minutes on 20 minutes off with a thin piece of cloth between the skin and ice.

When should you call for help?

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- You have new or worse pain.
- Your hand or fingers are cool or pale or change colour.
- You have tingling, weakness, or numbness in your hand or fingers.
- You are bleeding through the cast

- You have signs of infection such as a fever, arm redness, a foul smell coming from the cast

At Home

You may need some help once you are home. It may take up to a few months before you fully recover. Talk to your healthcare team if you have any concerns about your recovery.

- Slowly get more active.
- Eat healthy and drink fluids as you did before surgery (unless your healthcare team gives you other instructions).
- Drink oral nutritional supplements (like Ensure Protein Max) for the first month after surgery to give you extra protein and help you heal faster.
- Take less pain medicine as your pain gets better.
- Take your blood thinner and other medicines as you were told.

What is anesthesia?

Anesthesia controls pain. And it keeps all your organs working normally during surgery or another kind of procedure.

Anesthesia can relax you. It can also make you sleepy or forgetful. Or it may make you unconscious. It depends on what kind you get.

Your anesthesia provider (anesthesiologist) will make sure you are comfortable and safe during the procedure or surgery.

There are different types of anesthesia.

- **Local anesthesia.** This type numbs a small part of the body. Doctors use it for simple procedures.
 - You get a shot in the area the doctor will work on.
 - You will feel some pressure during the procedure.
 - You may stay awake. Or you may get medicine to help you relax or sleep.
- **Regional anesthesia.** This type blocks pain to a larger area of the body. It can also help relieve pain right after surgery. And it may reduce your need for other pain medicine after surgery. There are different types. They include:

- Peripheral nerve block. This is a shot near a specific nerve or group of nerves. It blocks pain in the part of the body supplied by the nerve. This is often used for procedures on the hands, arms, feet, legs, or face.
- Epidural and spinal anesthesia. This is a shot near the spinal cord and the nerves around it. It blocks pain from an entire area of the body, such as the belly, hips, or legs.
- **General anesthesia.** This type affects the brain and the whole body. You may get it through a small tube placed in a vein (IV). You are unconscious and will not feel pain. During the surgery, you will be comfortable. Later, you will not remember much about the surgery.

What type will you have?

The type of anesthesia you have depends on many things, such as:

- The type of surgery or procedure and the reason you are having it.
- Test results, such as blood tests.
- How worried you feel about the surgery.
- Your health. Your doctor and nurses will ask you about any past surgeries. They will ask about any health problems you may have, such as diabetes, lung or heart disease, or a history of stroke. They will want to know if you take medicine, such as blood thinners. Your doctor may also ask if any family members have had any problems with anesthesia. You will talk with your anesthesia provider about your options. In many cases, you may be able to choose the type of anesthesia you have.

What can you expect after having anesthesia?

Right after the surgery, you will be in the recovery room. Nurses will make sure you are comfortable. As the anesthesia wears off, you may feel some pain and discomfort from your surgery.

Tell someone if you have pain. Pain medicine works better if you take it before the pain gets bad.

You may feel some of the effects of anesthesia for a while. It takes time for the effects of the medicine to completely wear off.

- If you had local or regional anesthesia you may feel numb and have less feeling in part of your body. It may also take a few hours for you to be able to move and control your muscles as usual.
- When you first wake up from general anesthesia, you may be confused. Or it may be hard to think clearly. This is normal.

- Don't do anything for 24 hours that requires attention to detail. This includes going to work, making important decisions, or signing any legal documents.

Other common side effects of anesthesia include:

- Nausea and vomiting. This does not usually last long. It can be treated with medicine.
- A slight drop in body temperature. You may feel cold and shiver when you first wake up.
- A sore throat, if you had general anesthesia.
- Muscle aches or weakness.
- Feeling tired.

You may go home the same day of surgery or you may stay in the hospital. Your doctor will check on your recovery from the anesthesia. He or she will answer any questions you may have.

For answers to frequently asked questions about your anesthetic, please visit

<https://www.cas.ca/en/about-cas/advocacy/anesthesia-faq>