

Frequently Asked Post-Op Questions for Carpometacarpal (CMC) Arthroplasty

My surgery is done, now what do I need to do?

For 10-14 days after surgery, you will wear a bulky dressing and splint that will stay on until your first post-op appointment. Your fingers and elbow are free to move. Showering with a bag taped at the forearm over the bandages will keep everything dry and clean. At your first post-op appointment, your sutures will be removed by nursing staff or physician assistant and you might (but not always) have some X-rays done. Your hand and thumb will be placed into a removable brace and you can shower and do gentle motion of the thumb without any weights, without any strengthening, or gripping with the thumb. You will have another follow up in the office at about the 6-8 weeks from your surgery to check your progress and start therapy with our therapist. At 10-12 weeks, you will be able to grip with the thumb gently and advance activities very slowly as tolerated and start strengthening the thumb grip with the occupational therapist.

How soon will I see relief of my symptoms?

Most patients notice relief of their arthritis pain on a delayed fashion but no less than 2-3 months from surgery. For the first 3 months after surgery you will not be able to forcefully use your thumb and this can be challenging for a lot of patients. The majority of patients feel completely satisfied with their outcome at the 6-9 month mark.

When can I go back to work?

You will not have full use of the surgical thumb for 10-12 weeks because it takes this much time for proper healing to occur. If your work demands are very low, and require no gripping or grabbing with the thumb, you can return to work 10-14 days after surgery as long as the thumb is not used at work. If the job requires heavy manual labor and forceful gripping with the thumb you will either have to return to light duty with the restrictions stated above, or be out for the full 12 week.

What can I do for my pain?

You will have a pain medication prescribed to you to take, if needed. Also limiting activities, elevating, and applying some ice can help manage post-op pain. You are allowed to use any over the counter medication of choice if you wish to avoid the prescribed narcotic. You should not drink alcohol, drive or operate heavy dangerous machinery while on the narcotic.

Will the surgical scar and redness improve?

Yes. This may take weeks to months but it does improve. Once the incision has fully healed you can massage the scar with some over the counter cream (any moisturizing cream or Vitamin E based cream) to help. And when outdoors, applying sunblock to the scar will help it from becoming too visible. The scar will eventually become invisible after around a year.

Are there any concerning signs or symptoms I should look for during my recovery?

If you experience fevers, significant redness or swelling around the surgical incision, excess bleeding or other drainage from the incision, abnormal numbness or increased pain around the incision contact our office at 812-333-2556.

What is the success rate of CMC arthroplasty? What is the recurrence rate?

The success rate of surgery in providing relief of arthritis pain is high but a small percentage of patient do not get the relief they are looking for. This is a very commonly performed procedure for thumb arthritis and it is very successful overall and has a very long track record and it being done. There is small chance the thumb will fall back into the void left in the area where the “saddle trapezium bone” is removed but this is rare and happens slowly over long period of time usually.

What are the risks during, and after CMC arthroplasty?

As with any surgery, there is a small degree of risk. Some risks include bleeding, bruising, infection, injury to the skin or major nerves, injuries to blood vessels, decrease in thumb grip strength, and scar tenderness and sensitivity.

Thank you for allowing us to be your orthopedic and hand surgery office and providers of choice.

Sincerely,

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Electronic link and downloadable version of this educational material is also available online at

TarekSibaiMD.com