

## **Things we wish we'd known before we each had shoulder surgery**

**\*\*No More Chip on Your Shoulder – Pointers from Patient Perspective \*\***

### **One Month Before Surgery**

Strengthen quads and core (legs, abs and back) – you'll need them!

Work on your flexibility – lower back, hips and hamstrings – you'll be doing lots of bending.

If able, arrange for a caregiver (friend or family) for at least 10 – 14 days that can be readily available to help you with basic tasks. You will need someone to pick you up and stay with you the first 24 hours per surgery facility rules.

Line up transportation from friends/family - -it will be several weeks before you can drive yourself.

### **Two Weeks Before Surgery**

Get a manicure and pedicure at salon with reputable sanitation practices- it will be a while before you can do this on your own.

Per MD pre-surgery instructions, no dental work, tattoos or body piercings.

If wintertime, arrange for snow removal.

Stop using fish oil, turmeric, cannabis.

If surgery is with your dominant arm, practice eating, showering, dressing, toileting with your other hand.

### **The Week Before Surgery – Preparations by Category**

#### **Sleeping**

If you don't have one, borrow or buy a comfortable, roomy recliner chair. If you don't have a recliner, pillows behind you will work.

Use a twin-size egg-crate foam mattress pad on the recliner. Cover with twin size sheet, tucking in if possible.

Make sure you have an assortment of pillows - thickness, size, etc. These help support your arm to increase comfort level. We bought but didn't like the triangle/wedge pillow (even when we graduated from recliner to bed).

Small table or chair to hold Cryocuff

#### **Diet and Digestion**

If you have a freezer, prepare and freeze microwaveable meals ahead of time. Soups and casseroles are good to have available. Use containers that are easy to open.

Make a batch of bran muffins to freeze.

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**The Week Before Surgery – Preparations by Category - continued**

Buy foods that are high in fiber: Steel Cut Oats (aka Irish or Scottish—bulk foods bins); prunes, fresh veggies and fruit; lentil soup or split pea soup. Spinach (Prcleaned bagged) for salads, in omelets, etc., bonus high in iron.

Steel Cut Oatmeal for breakfast - the night before, bring 3 1/2 cups water to boil, add 1 cup steel cut oats, remove from stove, and cover with lid. They're now ready for the morning and great with blueberries. Put leftovers in the refrigerator.

Rearrange refrigerator and freezer contents, so that you can easily reach the items you'll be using most.

Buy stool softener capsules - prescription pain meds impair lower digestive tract.

**Pain Management**

Ask your surgeon about getting a nerve block.

Check your supply of Tylenol, ibuprofen or naproxen and buy if needed. Some think liquid tabs are easier on your stomach.

Fill prescriptions, ones you take regularly, as well as surgery related.

Make sure you have water bottles to freeze for the cryocuff/ice machine. Start making ice.

Yogurt smoothies or something similar for your stomach when taking pain meds (aid digestion, coat stomach when taking meds in middle of night), smoothies are easy to swig down).

Sports bottle for water for taking pills (sports top, not screw lid).

Ziploc bags for ice. Gallon and quart freezer bags work best.

Gel ice (envelope size, pliable).

Make your own gel ice by mixing water and rubbing alcohol. Mix 2-3 cups water with 1 cup of rubbing alcohol. Pour into freezer ziploc bag or rubber water bottle and freeze. NOTE: DO NOT DRINK – it will make you VERY SICK!

**Hygiene**

***Get a 'wash and wear' hair cut and style.***

You'll want an electric toothbrush.

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Buy toiletries (in pump bottles or travel sizes). Alternatively, transfer products into small travel containers (shampoo, conditioner, lotion, contact solution etc.).

**The Week Before Surgery – Preparations by Category - continued**

**Hygiene continued**

Cornstarch or baby powder for chafing and 'dry' showers.

Pedestal style mirror.

Tucks or Cottonelle Wipes.

Pump foamy soap for hand washing.

Purell for hand sanitation.

Y shape dental floss picks (or check with your dentist for other options, especially if you have tight spacing between teeth).

**Clothing**

Take a soft, comfortable 100% cotton tee shirt for day of surgery or a lightweight zip front sweatshirt (without hood).

Roomy Men's v-neck soft cotton undershirts at least 3 (v-neck is easier to maneuver than crew neck)—you'll want at least 3: one for day, one for sleeping, one in laundry.

Make sure you have sturdy, slip on shoes to take to surgery, e.g., Merrills.

Cotton zip or button up long sleeve shirts without hoods (hoods bunch up = neck ache).

2 -3 pairs soft cotton loose fitting lounge pants with elastic waistband.

Women – front hook bra with removable/hook straps.

Keep the non-skid socks so you so you don't slip on stairs.

If wintertime, slip on ice grippers for shoes.

**General**

Cordless/cell phone and/or bell for summoning people when you need help.

Put away all area or throw rugs to reduce tripping hazard.

Ensure hallways or stairs are sufficiently lit – replace burned out bulbs.

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Use nightlights in hallways, your sleeping area and bathrooms to reduce tripping hazards at nighttime.

### **Surgery Day – Be sure to take**

Comfortable 100% cotton tee shirt or hoodless zip up sweatshirt

Cotton lounge pants

Sturdy slip-on shoes

If wintertime, slip on ice grippers. Also, small blanket or beach towel in car to keep you warm instead of a jacket

Advance Medical Directive if you want/have one

### **Post Surgery by Category**

#### **Sleeping**

Recliner is your FRIEND. Try different pillows under your head/back of shoulder/elbow and arm to increase comfort. You can also try rolling up various sizes of towels (and secure with rubber bands). Sleeping is IMPORTANT - -likely that the recliner will be your 'bed' for 6-8 weeks or longer.

Make sure everything you need is within reach: meds, water bottle, phone or bell, glasses, Kleenex, etc.

When you 'graduate' from recliner to bed, take the assortment of pillows/towels with you. If experiencing lower back pain, put a thin/medium pillow under your knees.

#### **Diet and Digestion**

Eat and drink per/discharge instructions. Start drinking water ASAP to rehydrate for healing and minimize constipation. If you can, start snacking on prunes, muffins, veggies, fruit, etc.

Use stool softener capsules as needed. Restart vitamins and other meds per MD direction.

Walking and Water Works Wonders! – as soon as you're able (sufficiently steady on your feet) supplement your water intake with walking around the house. Trust us, the LAST thing you'll want to deal with is constipation - -walking and water helps your lower intestine do its thing.

If surgery hand =dominant hand, eating out of large coffee mugs is easiest. Dishtowel draped across chest keeps your clothes clean – smile when you say BIB!

#### **Infection**

Watch for: redness in arm, fever, extreme soreness, excessive swelling in hand or nausea. Contact MD at once if you suspect infection.

#### **Pain Management**

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Dressings – leave any dressings/bandages in place. If you go home from surgery with a pain ball and the dressings seem wet, contact # on the pain ball to ensure that the ball isn't leaking.

Keep a few Ziploc bags in the car with you so that you can have ice whenever you need it.

Do all prescribed physical therapy (PT) exercises and incision/scar management.

### **Hygiene**

Once you're healed enough to shower, get everything ready and within easy reach (lotions, towels, powder) BEFORE you get in the shower. Use powder under arms and other sensitive and/or hard to reach areas as needed.

Try a 'dry' run in the shower or tub first, to figure out how you're going to get in and out. Until you have confidence, have a buddy around when you shower.

If you need to have a spacer for your arm in the shower, a partially inflated beach ball (covered with a pillowcase so it doesn't slip) works great.

Flossing – if you can't use floss picks, due to tight teeth spacing try sitting on corner of ottoman or bed and bending over to floss your teeth or use a water jet to clean your teeth.

Use the pedestal mirror for grooming. If you have vessel sinks, prop recovering arm on sink, or an upside-down bucket also works.

### **Clothing**

To change clothes, maneuver your recovering arm in and out of sleeves first while bending over (similar to pendulum exercise, if you were directed to do pendulums).

If you need an arm spacer while changing clothes, use a rolled-up towel or washcloth.

Ladies – ask your PT for a bra strap cushioning pad (now you see why you need removable straps).

### **General**

**Cordless/cell phone and/or bell for summoning people when you need help WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES. Remember to charge phone batteries regularly!**

Drink water, eat prunes, do your EXERCISES, SLEEP, REST and eat nutritious foods to help your body mend. When you need rest, turn phones off (or take off hook) and put 'do not disturb' notes on doorbell.

In winter, rather than wrestling with a jacket, keep a small blanket or beach towel in the car to use as a wrap to keep you warm.

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Even after released from sling, wear it if going out into crowds (e.g., concert, sporting event). It gives people around you a visual clue not to bump into you.

If you'll be alone recovering at home for periods of time, develop a checklist of items you need to have in place before your companion heads out the door: phone, water, snacks, Kleenex, glasses, meds, fresh ice in Cryocuff, etc.

Ready to go back to work? For mobility, use a roll-along bag to carry your lunch, ice packs, laptop, etc.

### **PT Exercising**

If you get bored counting to 10 doing PT, put on some upbeat music. Don't RUSH through your exercises - allow plenty of time to do at a measured pace, in deliberate manner.

If you have trouble with your coordination (one of us was completely pathetic using the dowel for external rotation) and can't get the 'hang' of an exercise, ask your PT for an alternative move. Also, if you experience sharp and/or persistent pain or muscle spasms- consult with your PT.

Ask about BioFreeze (pain relief gel), many have good results with CBD cream (no THC).

If instructed to do so, massage your scar - it really works (and feels good)!

If you use therabands as part of your therapy program, put on a pair of safety glasses before you start (yes, it's kinda scary when one of those bands rips in two and let's go in the middle of a stretch).

### **The Final Word**

You're paying for PT (either directly or through insurance premiums), so **\*\*DO\*\*** your home exercise program. Why would you pay for a professional service and not use it? Would you go to a restaurant, order a meal and then walk away without eating? Would you hire an accountant to prepare your taxes, then not file? Same principle applies here.

If you don't understand something or are concerned about something, ASK! You want to have the best recovery possible, so don't be shy – it's YOUR QUALITY of LIFE that is impacted by your understanding and ownership of your recovery. Take notes if it will help you retain information at MDs or at PT. Ask for written instructions.

The contents herein are merely observations based on one family's experience of having two shoulder surgeries in three months, NOT medical opinion. These are 'helpful hints' we wished someone would've shared with us prior to undergoing surgery. No expertise is implied. You are responsible for your recovery.

**\*\*\*\* ALWAYS follow the instructions of your medical provider\*\*\*\***