



PATIENT INFORMATION

After Your Surgery: Recovery & Care

Your operation is done — now healing begins. This guide explains how to care for your arm after shoulder, elbow, wrist or hand surgery, and what to expect as you recover. Always follow the specific instructions Dr Julyan and the ward sister give you; where they differ from this leaflet, **their instructions come first**.

1 Your sling or support

- Wear your sling exactly as instructed — commonly for **2 to 6 weeks**, depending on your operation.
- The sling protects the repair while it heals. Keep it on, including at night, unless you are told otherwise.
- Take it off only for washing, dressing and the exercises you have been given.
- Gently move your fingers, wrist and elbow often (unless told not to) to reduce stiffness and swelling.

What to do

- Rest the arm and keep it **raised on a pillow** to limit swelling.
- Use an ice pack wrapped in a cloth for 15–20 minutes if advised.
- Take your pain medication (script) as directed — staying ahead of pain helps you move and sleep.
- Keep the dressing clean and dry.
- Do your exercises and attend physiotherapy or hand therapy.
- Eat well, stay hydrated, and attend every follow-up at the rooms.

What not to do

- Don't get the wound wet until told it is safe — no baths, swimming or hot tubs.
- Don't lift, push or carry more than advised (often nothing heavier than a cup of tea at first).
- Don't push up from a chair or bed with the operated arm.
- Don't force the arm into extreme positions you've been told to avoid.
- Don't drive in a sling or on strong pain medication, and don't mix alcohol with it.
- Don't smoke — it slows bone and tendon healing.

2 Wound care

- Keep the wound clean and dry. Dissolving stitches don't need removing; other stitches or clips are usually removed at the rooms after about **10–14 days**.
- Some bruising and mild swelling around the wound is normal.

- A little clear fluid can occur, but increasing redness, pus or a bad smell is not normal — contact the rooms.

3 Pain and medication

- Some pain is a normal part of healing and settles over days to weeks.
- Take your medication as prescribed and reduce it as the pain eases.
- If you had a nerve block, your arm may feel numb and heavy for **12–24 hours** — protect it until normal feeling returns.

4 Physiotherapy and rehabilitation

- Rehabilitation is **half of your result**. Gentle movement usually starts early; strengthening is added later, in stages.
- Attend every physiotherapy or hand-therapy session and do your home exercises.
- Therapy should not be sharply painful — work within the range you are given.

Medical scheme note: cover for physiotherapy and hand therapy varies by scheme and plan. Check your benefits and whether a referral or authorisation is needed before you start.

5 Getting back to normal

- **Washing & dressing:** plan for one-handed tasks; a button-front shirt is easier than pulling clothes over your head.
- **Driving:** only once you are out of the sling, off strong painkillers, and can control the car safely — often 2–6 weeks after shoulder surgery, sooner after minor hand procedures. Confirm with Dr Julyan.
- **Work:** desk work is often possible within days to two weeks; manual or overhead work can take considerably longer.
- **Sleep:** many people are more comfortable propped up, with a pillow supporting the arm.

! When to get help — warning signs

Phone the rooms during office hours, or go to your nearest hospital **casualty / emergency unit**, if you have:

- A temperature of **38°C or higher**, chills, or feeling very unwell.
- Increasing redness, swelling, warmth or discharge from the wound, or a wound that opens.
- Pain that is getting worse or is not controlled by your medication.
- A hand or fingers that turn cold, pale, blue or increasingly numb, or a dressing that feels too tight.
- Calf pain or swelling, or chest pain or shortness of breath — this is an emergency.

Emergency: phone 10177 (ambulance) or 112 from a mobile. If it is life-threatening, go straight to casualty.

Rooms: Suite 6, Netcare Pretoria East Hospital, Cnr Garsfontein Rd & Netcare Drive, Moreletapark, Pretoria 0044

Tel: 012 998 7550 **After hours:** 082 923 4477 **Appointments:** yvette@antonjulyan.co.za

This leaflet gives general information for patients of Dr Anton Julyan and is written for a South African context. It does not replace the specific advice Dr Julyan, the anaesthetist or the nursing staff give you — their instructions always take precedence. Every patient, condition and recovery is different, and individual results vary. This is not a substitute for professional medical advice. In an emergency, phone **10177** (ambulance) or **112** from a mobile, or go to your nearest hospital casualty/emergency unit. © Dr Anton Julyan Orthopaedic Surgeon Inc. Draft for clinical review.