

Ali Totonchi, M.D.
(216) 778 - 2262



Care after Arm Lift (Brachioplasty)

This page contains answers to frequently asked questions regarding your care after arm lift (brachioplasty). This information will help you to remember the instructions given to you after surgery.

What will I see when I look into a mirror?

The incisions will be covered with clear, non-stick gauze and a white gauze dressing held in position usually with ace wraps. A small amount of dry blood on the dressing is normal. This initial dressing will be removed at your first follow-up visit. Your hands and forearms may feel swollen and tight. You may have a sensation of numbness in the arms and/or forearms. This is normal.

When can I shower or take a bath?

You can normally shower after your first follow-up visit using a mild fragrance free soap such as Ivory or Dove. Avoid using very hot water. Your arms will be tender, so wash this area gently and pat dry with a clean towel. Allow the area to fully dry before putting on your compression sleeve or garment (usually ½ hour).

Should I wrap my arms?

When I change your first dressing you will be provided with elastic tube gauze that helps to control the swelling in both your forearms and arms. It is recommended that you use these compression garments for 12 weeks after your surgery. Patients who have an arm lift combined with a breast procedure will be instructed to purchase a special all-in-one garment for support of both areas.

How do I care for my drains?

Your drains are held in place with stitches to your skin and should always be supported to avoid pulling on the drain. The easiest method is to safety pin the drain bulb to your dressing support or clothing.

The “How to care for your drain” pamphlet has more detailed information. Drains are generally removed within 7 to 10 days after your surgery.

What can I do after surgery?

You should “take it easy” for several days following the surgery and gradually increase your activity as you feel more comfortable. Avoid heavy exercise also during this time and only gradually return to your normal routine. You can resume all of your normal activities about two to three weeks after surgery.

When can I drive?

You generally should be able to drive about three to five days after surgery if you feel up to it. *You should never drive if you are still taking any pain medication other than Tylenol.*

When will I be able to return to work?

Depending on the type of work you do, you should be able to return to your job as soon as you are comfortable. If your job does not require heavy activity, you should be able to go back in one – two weeks..

How much pain will I have?

The most discomfort that you will have lasts three to five days, sometimes a little longer. As you feel more comfortable, your need for medication will lessen.

What medications should I use?

I will prescribe a pain medication for you and may also have you take an antibiotic. Follow the directions on the bottle for their use. The pain medication will make you feel drowsy. Have someone assist you in your home and do not attempt to drive while you are taking the pain medication. A few days after surgery, most patients will find that Tylenol will take care of the discomfort. Do not use aspirin for five days after the surgery.

Can I drink alcohol?

Do not drink alcohol for five days after your surgery.

When will I be seen in the office after surgery?

You will normally be seen in the office within two to five days of your surgery and then at about one month, three months, and six months after surgery to monitor healing. Additional appointments may be necessary and will be determined by your recovery.

How will I know if I am having a problem?

Urgent problems after arm lift do not occur frequently. These are the complications that will require a change in your post-operative care:

Hematoma (blood collecting under your arm incisions) can occur within a few days of your surgery. The warning signs are:

Severe pain that does not respond to medication

Significant swelling in your arms

Excessive or growing bruising of the arms

Infection is rare following arm lift. It is normal to have a very small amount of drainage from your incisions for one to two days. Signs of infection are:

Increased temperature

Increasing drainage from the incisions

Increasing redness around the incisions

Leg swelling with or without associated pain may indicate a problem with the vein circulation in your leg(s). Although some swelling is to be expected due to your surgery, intravenous fluids given to you during the surgery and your decreased level of activity, this swelling is normally mild, painless and affects both legs evenly. If you have a large amount of leg swelling (either one or both legs) or if you experience pain in your legs contact the office immediately.

Breathing problems after arm lifts are rare but can be a serious complication. If you develop any chest and/or back pain or the feeling of being short of breath you must contact my office or be seen in the nearest emergency medical facility without delay.

Medication reactions may occur with the drugs prescribed for you. If you develop a skin rash, itching, vomiting, or diarrhea, stop taking your medication and contact my office.

If you have any of the above problems or other questions, contact my office, 216-778-4450.