

WHAT TO EXPECT AFTER SURGERY (from an actual patient's viewpoint)

Whether right or left handed, these are SOME of the actual daily instances and occurrences you can, and will, experience. I am female so some of these “tips” may not be applicable.

1. You will need someone very patient and caring to help you – because you will definitely need assistance.
2. Showering will be challenging (NOTE: I will use this word often because it is an undeniable fact) – from washing your hair to shaving. Be patient – keep your arm above your head (wrapped securely in plastic bags, etc.). I found that having body wash, shampoo and conditioner in pump bottles made each task easier. Remember - you will only have one hand to handle what was the function of two.

Combing out wet hair – practice with the opposite hand beforehand so that you can get the feel for the limitation and time involved.

Same goes for hair styling tools – unless you live with a stylist, and you have long(er) hair, a scrunchie or headband will be your new best friend.

Ditto for clipping your nails. You might be able to use an emery board after a couple of weeks or so.

3. Not a popular subject but a daily function nonetheless – using the toilet. Practice before surgery using the opposite hand. Awkward – yes, but it can be done.
4. Earrings/necklaces – forget about it for the first several days, at least. Post earrings are a pain to put in and remove. Claps on necklace are impossible. Same goes for makeup (I nearly put my eye out trying to put on mascara!). Likewise for plucking your eyebrows (this was particularly irksome for me as I am right-handed and the surgery was on my right hand). This may not be applicable to everyone.

Give yourself time – most everything that is currently a pain, aggravating, etc., will become easier to handle/do. Seriously, go with the flow and allow yourself to go “natural” for however long you need/want. Remember – even fashion models have their off days – yours just may be a tad bit longer. Don’t worry about it, truly. Truthfully, I was surprised when a co-worker told me that she didn’t realize I wasn’t wearing makeup (not

exactly certain that was a compliment or a comment on the fact that I do not wear much makeup to begin with. I decided to take it as a compliment 😊).

5. Clothing – first and foremost – have tops/shirts etc. with **WIDE** cuff openings or that will stretch to accommodate the cast (it will be **large** around the hand). Otherwise, wear items that you will not mind having to stretch/ruin in order to wear. (Note: Velcro straps on the brace will catch and snag your tops.) Buttons and zippers will take a little practice. I suggest you forego the tight jeans etc. as you will not be able to use your thumbs to pull up/take off. Likewise, bras. This is an area that having someone to help put one on and take off is absolutely needed (especially while wearing the cast). Same applies to hose/socks/tights. However, after a couple of weeks, you should be able to get the hang of putting these items on and removing. Challenging but do-able.
6. I found that carrying a smaller/lighter-weight handbag was easier to deal with. Your arm will be in a sling for the first several days after surgery (especially the first 24+/- hours until the arm block wears off – in addition to which the weight of the cast alone will call for this) and having a lighter bag to deal with will help.
7. Opening bottles, cans, sealed bags, ziplocks, etc. – **no can do** for a few weeks. When eating anything that requires cutting (steaks, chicken, whatever), you will need someone to do this for you. That is unless you don't mind eating with your hand (this, however, is typically frowned upon in most restaurants). Finger-foods are easiest.
8. We have small dogs – but even trying to pick them up was impossible the first few weeks. Even though you are wearing a cast or splint, it is possible to damage the incision/wound with excessive straining or weight lifting.
9. Driving – absolutely no way you can/should drive for at least 5 weeks – it's simply not worth the risk to you or others.
10. I work with a computer – your typing abilities will be greatly reduced but will gradually grow easier as you become accustomed to the weight of the cast and the splint that will follow. Using something as simple as a paperclip could be difficult – DO NOT try to use your thumb and risk stressing the incision etc. Ditto for writing. Expect your handwriting to greatly resemble that of your physician. 😊
11. If you work outside the home – you will/may need to rely on your co-workers – as they are the ones you will go to go for assistance with opening bottles, etc. Likewise, this applies especially to your immediate family/roommate/friends – they may think they understand what you are going through, but your frustrations with your limitations will

sometimes spill over onto them. Apologize and be thankful for whatever they do to help you.

12. Trust your surgeon and physical therapist when they instruct you to do things a certain way – they didn't gain the reputation they have without experience/knowledge. You trusted the surgeon to perform the surgery and he/she trust their PT people.

I hope by sharing some of my experiences that it will be of help to others with their own post-surgery experience.