Sling Use,
Following Injury or Surgery to the Shoulder

You have been put in a sling today because of an injury or following surgery. If you have a tendon or bone injury it may take up to six weeks to heal. Use the sling as directed until your caregiver says it is no longer needed. The sling protects and keeps you from using the injured part. Hanging your arm in a sling will give rest and support to the injured part. This also helps with comfort and healing. Slings are used for injuries made worse or more painful by movement. Examples would be:

- Broken arms.
- Broken collarbones.
- Shoulder injuries.
- Following surgery.

The sling should fit comfortably, with your elbow at one end of the sling and your hand at the other end. Your elbow is bent 90 degrees lying across your waist and rests in the sling with your thumb pointing up. Your hand is outside the open end of the sling. Your hand should be slightly higher than your elbow. You may also pad the sling behind your neck with some cloth or foam rubber.

A swathe may also be used if it is necessary to keep you from lifting your injured arm. A swathe is a wrap or ace bandage that goes around your chest over your injured arm.

To take the weight off your neck, some slings have a strap that goes around your neck and down your back. One strap is connected to the closed elbow side of the sling with the other end of the strap attached to the wrist side. With a sling like this, your injured shoulder, arm, wrist, or hand is in the sling, the weight is more on your shoulder and back. This is different from the illustration where the sling is supported only by the neck.

In an emergency, a sling can be as simple as a belt or towel tied around your neck to hold your forearm.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Do not use your shoulder until instructed to by your caregiver.
- If you have been prescribed physical therapy, keep appointments as directed.
- For the first couple days following your injury and during times when you are sore, you may use ice on the injured area for 15 to 20 minutes 4 times per day while awake. Put the ice in a plastic bag and place a towel between the bag of ice and your skin. This will help keep the swelling down.
- If there is numbness in the fifth finger and ring fingers you may need to pad the elbow to relieve pressure on the *ulnar nerve* (the crazy bone).
- Keep your arm on your chest when lying down.
- If a plaster splint was applied, wear the splint until you are seen for a follow-up examination. Rest it on nothing harder than a pillow the first 24 hours. Do not get it wet. You may take it off to take a shower or bath unless instructed otherwise by your caregiver.
- You may have been given an elastic bandage to use with the plaster splint or alone. The splint is too tight if you have numbness, tingling, or if your hand becomes cold and blue. Adjust or reapply the bandage to make it comfortable.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- If range of motion exercises are permitted by your caregiver, do not go over the limits suggested. If you have increased pain from doing gentle exercises, stop the exercises until you see your caregiver again.
- The length of time needed for healing depends on what your injury or surgery was.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have an increase in bruising, swelling or pain in the area of your injury or surgery.
- You notice a blue color of or coldness in your fingers.
- Pain relief is not obtained with medications or any of your problems are getting worse.

Document Released: 01/06/2009 Document Re-Released: 03/16/2010
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