

Aftercare for extensor tendon repair to your finger

Occupational Therapy

Information for Patients

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Introduction

Tendons are tough cords of tissue that attach muscles to the bones. These parts all work together to make the joints in your hand move.

There are a number of extensor tendons in your hand that allow you to straighten your fingers, thumb and wrist. Damage to a tendon can happen through any type of trauma which causes the tendon to be cut or crushed.

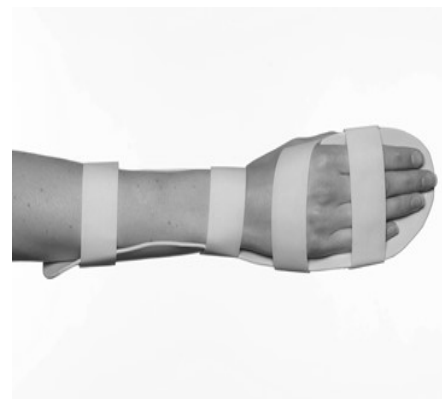
You have cut the tendon in your hand and it has been repaired by the surgeon. This involves making a cut in your hand, finding the ends of your tendon, and then stitching them back together.

Tendons take a long time to heal. It takes at least 12 weeks after the tendon is repaired for it to regain full strength. At first the repair will be very weak; if you use your hand too soon the repair can break and fail.

After surgery you will have occupational therapy and physiotherapy. This will involve wearing a splint and doing exercises that we will show you.

Your splint

After your tendon has been repaired, the surgeon will put a protective slab under your hand and wrist. This is usually made from plaster of Paris. Normally, within the first week after your operation, this will then be changed by your occupational therapist to a lighter version with straps.



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The splint will protect your tendon repair by stopping you from bending your fingers too far and prevent placing tension on the repair.

Your splint will be made in a position to allow you to do certain exercises whilst wearing it.

It is very important that you **do not remove** your splint, because if you bend your fingers more than the splint allows you to, your tendon repair is at risk of breaking. If this happens you will need to have another operation to repair it.

You will need to wear the splint at all times for 4 weeks. We advise you not to use your hand for your everyday activities during this time.

Exercises

The exercises your therapist will teach you will allow your repaired tendon to move and stop it from becoming stuck down by scar tissue.

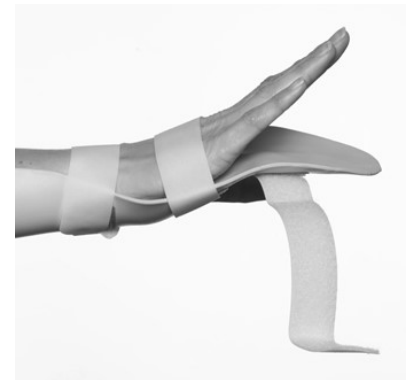
You will start your exercises soon after your operation. You may start them in the plaster that was put on your hand when you came out of surgery, or you may start them after you have had your splint fitted.

It is important that you only do your exercises within the plaster or the splint.

Exercise 1:

Remove the top strap of your splint. Straighten up your fingers as far as you are able, then return your fingers back down onto the splint. Repeat 4 times.

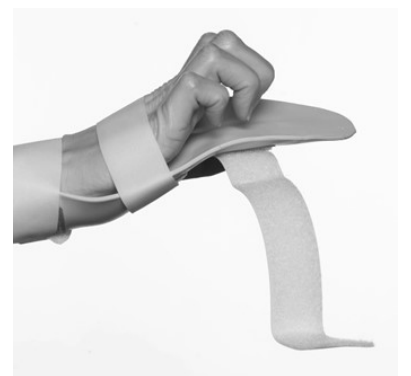
Carry out this exercise 4 times a day.



Exercise 2:

Remove the top strap of your splint. Straighten up your fingers as far as you are able, as in exercise 1. Then bend the top 2 knuckles of your fingers into a 'hook' position. Then straighten your top 2 knuckles and return your fingers back down onto the splint. Repeat 4 times.

Carry out this exercise 4 times a day.



General advice

• Activity

At 4 weeks you will be able to do light activity. Your therapist will tell you which activities are safe to do with your hand. Do not do any heavy lifting or forceful gripping until at least 12 weeks after your operation.

Specific advice will be given for your job role as needed.

You should not drive a car for at least 8 weeks; your therapist will give you further guidance.

• Wound dressing

Dressing changes to your wound will be done as needed at your appointments. It is important to keep your hand clean and dry to help your wound heal.

If you smoke, it is highly recommended that you stop, as smoking can affect the circulation in your hand and slow down the healing. Your physiotherapist, occupational therapist or doctor can give you advice about stopping smoking.

Your stitches will come out usually between 10 to 14 days after your operation. Sometimes dissolvable stitches are used which do not need removing.

Once your wound has healed your therapist will give you advice to help reduce scarring and prevent your scar from becoming stuck down. This will help you to get movement back.

• Swelling

You may have some swelling in your hand after your operation which is quite normal.

To reduce this it is important to raise your hand above your heart level. This can be done whilst sitting or lying, by resting your hand across your chest/ shoulder or by using pillows.

Do not walk around with your hand hanging down at your side for long periods during the first 4 weeks after your operation.

Complications

If your wound becomes hot, red, very painful or leaks fluid, it could be infected. Please contact your GP as soon as possible.

If you notice that you cannot move your fingers in the way you did before or if you hear a 'snapping' sound, your tendon repair could have broken. If this happens contact your doctor as soon as possible.

If you have less movement in your finger, your tendon may have become stuck down with scar tissue. Your therapist will give you advice to help with this.

Damage can happen to the nerves in your finger, either at the time of your injury or during the surgery to repair your tendon. If this happens it will affect the feeling in your finger. This may get better gradually or you may always have reduced feeling. Your therapist will give you advice about this.

Contact details

Name of Occupational Therapist:

Telephone number:

Name of Physiotherapist:

Telephone number:

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل
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