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Aftercare for an extensor tendon repair to your finger - SAM exercises

Occupational Therapy

Information for Patients

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You have cut the tendon(s) in your hand and they have been repaired by the surgeon.

Tendon repair involves making a cut in your hand, finding the ends of the tendon, and then stitching them back together.

What is a tendon?

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

There are 2 types of tendons in your hand:

1. **Extensor tendons** run along the top of the hand. They help to straighten fingers.
2. **Flexor tendons** run across the palm of the hand. They help the fingers to bend.

You have had an injury to your finger.

Damage to a tendon can happen through any type of trauma causing the tendon to be cut or crushed.

How long does it take to heal?

It takes at least 12 weeks after the tendon is repaired for it to regain full strength.

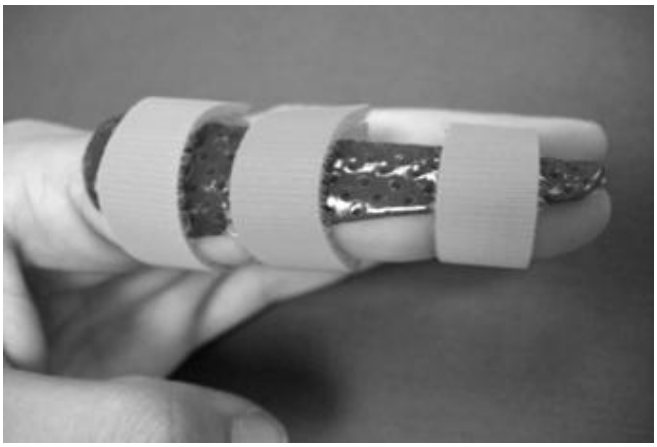
Tendons need a long period of therapy because the repair will be very weak at first. Too much stress, too early, through the repair will cause it to break and fail.

What is SAM?

After your surgery you will wear a splint and do a number of exercises every day. The exercises are called short arc motion or SAM for short.

Your splints

A splint will be made for you to keep your finger straight. This protects your tendon repair by stopping you from bending your fingers too far.



It is important you **do not remove** your splint.

If you bend your fingers more than allowed, your tendon repair is at risk of breaking. If this happens you will need to have another operation to repair it.

For 4 weeks you will wear the splint at all times. Please do not use your hand for everyday activities during this time.

Exercises

Please do these exercises **every 2 hours**.

Exercise 1

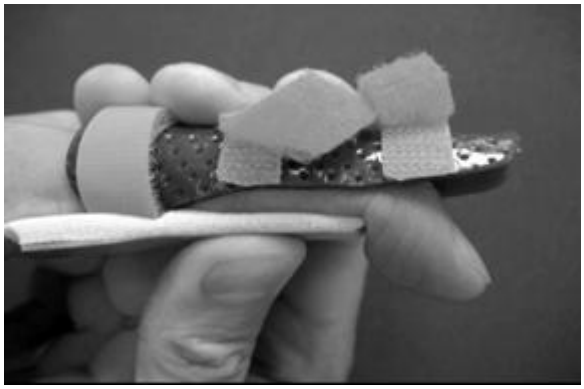
1. Bend the main knuckles of the hand as far as you can.
2. Return to fully straight.
3. Repeat 15 times.





Exercise 2

1. Remove the end strap.
2. Support the middle joint with the blocking splint.
3. Bend the tip of your finger as far as you can.
4. Repeat 15 times.



Exercise 3

For this exercise please keep your wrist bent gently forwards.

1. Remove the top 2 straps.
2. Place the exercise splint you have been given under your finger.
3. With your wrist slightly bent forwards bend the finger to the exercise splint and then back to fully straight.
4. Repeat 15 times.



General advice

Activity:

- Do not use your hand for any activity for 4 weeks.
- Only do the exercises you have been advised to do by your therapist. It does not help to do more exercises than advised.
- At 4 weeks you will be able to do light tasks. Your therapist will tell you which activities are safe to do.
- You will be told not to carry out any heavy lifting or forceful gripping until at least 12 weeks after your operation.
- Specific advice will be given if you are in employment.
- You are advised not to drive for at least 8 weeks. Your therapist will give you more guidance.

Swelling:

- You may have some swelling in your hand after your operation. This is quite normal.
- To reduce this, it is important to raise (elevate) 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 call your GP as soon as possible.

If you notice that you cannot move your finger(s) in the way you did before or if you have felt a 'snapping', your tendon repair could have broken. If this happens you should contact the surgical team at the hospital as soon as possible. If you are unable to contact the surgical team, contact your occupational therapist.

Your tendons may become stuck to surrounding tissues. This may mean you have less range of movement in the finger(s). Your therapist will advise you about this.

Damage can happen to the nerves in your finger (s) 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(s). This may get better slowly or you may always have less feeling. Your therapists will talk to you about this.

Contact details

Name of occupational therapist……...

Telephone number……

Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice
Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

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