

Therapy following surgery on your hand for Dupuytren's disease

Department of Occupational Therapy

Information for Patients

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Introduction

Dupuytren's disease affects the sheet of connective tissue (fascia) under the palm of the hand. It may at first present as a lump (nodule) followed by a tendon-like cord. The skin may gather into wrinkles or folds and become hard. This thickening and shortening of the fascia over time causes the finger(s) to bend in towards the palm.

It is more common in the little and ring fingers but can affect the other fingers including the thumb. It is not usually painful but the bend in the finger(s) can interfere with normal hand function.

Surgery

A surgical procedure is still one of the most common ways to correct the problem. Surgery to straighten your fingers is known as a Fasciectomy. This involves making cuts in the skin usually in a zig-zag pattern. The diseased fascia can then be removed before closing the wound. After surgery it is not always possible to fully straighten the finger(s). The small nerves in the fingers which are close to the diseased tissue are at risk of damage. This may cause the finger to feel numb or tingly.

Following the surgery your hand will have been dressed and the surgeon may have put you in a protective plaster. You will have limited finger movement at first. It is important that you keep any dressings dry and keep the hand raised above heart level to help reduce swelling. Any stitches should be removed at about 10 to 14 days after surgery unless they are dissolvable.

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Your splint



At your first occupational therapy appointment a custom made plastic splint will be made for you. Your therapist will decide what design of splint is best for you. The splint is usually worn overnight so that it doesn't affect you using your hand during the day.

Once the wound has healed, the purpose of the splint is to provide a gentle stretch to the scar tissue to help it change shape and to help keep the finger(s) as straight as possible. You may be expected to wear the splint for up to 6 months as this is how long it can take for the scar tissue to fully mature.

If it was not possible to straighten the finger during surgery, it will not be possible to fully straighten it with the splint. The aim of the splint is then to maintain what has been achieved from surgery and to prevent the finger from bending again.

You should bring your splint to each follow-up appointment. It will be adjusted / remoulded as needed to make sure it continues to fit correctly and provide a stretch.

Complications after surgery

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

Looking after your scar

Once the stitches have been removed and you are sure the wound is dry and healed, you can get the hand wet. It is also important at this stage to start to massage the scar. Use a thick moisturising cream that isn't perfumed. This will help reduce the dryness, remove any scabs and soften the skin. It also helps to reduce any swelling and warms the tissues under the wound.

This in turn will make it easier for you to do your exercises. It is therefore a good idea to do the massage before doing your exercise programme.

Your exercises

Your therapist will teach you the exercise programme. Exercises allow the tendons that bend the finger to glide to exercise your fingers even when the stitches are still in place, because the hand can become stiff very quickly. However at first, it is important that you do not over exercise and only use your hand for light activities.

Complete the following exercises 4 times a day:

Exercise 1:

Start with your fingers straight then bend your big knuckles to 90°.

Repeat _____ **times**



Exercise 2:

Start with your fingers as straight as possible, keep the big knuckles straight and gently make a hook with the top 2 finger joints.

Repeat _____ **times**



Exercise 3:

Spread out your fingers and thumb as wide as you can and then close them back together.

Repeat _____ **times**



Exercise 4:

Touch your thumb to each fingertip.

Repeat _____ times

**Progression of exercises**

About 2 weeks after surgery you may be given further exercises to do that involve using your non-affected hand to manually move the joints into position. These are passive stretches and you should hold each one for a count of 20 seconds. They are best performed before the above active exercises and after scar massage. Your therapist will tell you which exercises they want you to do.

You may also be given further active exercises to do depending on your progress or needs.

Swelling

You may have some swelling in your hand after your surgery which is normal. To reduce this it is important to keep your hand raised above your heart level. Do not walk around with your hand hanging down at your side for long periods.

Over time the swelling should reduce; movement and use will help with this. If the swelling does not go down, talk to your therapist as there maybe other things you can try which will help.

Name of Occupational Therapist: _____

Telephone Number: _____

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