

Aftercare for extensor tendon repair to your finger (Norwich regime)

Hands Burns Plastics Therapy

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: March 2025

Next review: March 2028

Leaflet number: 1026 Version: 3

Introduction

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

The extensor tendons in your hand work to straighten your fingers, thumb and wrist. Tendons can be damaged through injuries such as cutting or crushing.

You have cut the tendon in your hand and it has been repaired by the surgeon. They have made a cut in your hand, found the ends of your tendon, and stitched them back together.

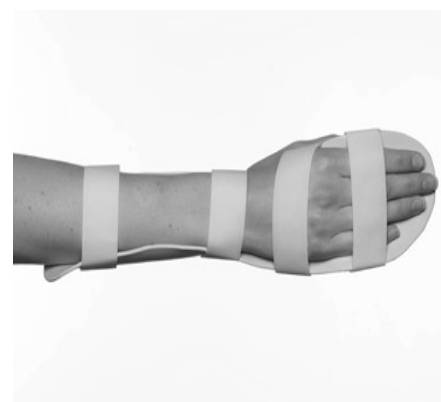
Tendons take a long time to heal. It takes at least 12 weeks after the tendon is repaired for it to regain full strength. At first the repair will be very weak; if you use your hand too soon the repair can break and fail.

After surgery you will have occupational therapy and physiotherapy. You will wear a splint and do exercises that we show you.

What happens after surgery?

After surgery your hand and wrist will be put a protective slab. This is made from plaster of Paris. Your occupational therapist will change this to a lighter version with straps in the first week after your operation.

The splint will protect your tendon repair. It does this by stopping you from bending your fingers too far and overstretching the repaired tendon.



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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

Your splint

The splint position will allow you to do finger exercises whilst wearing it.

Do not remove your splint. If you bend your fingers more than the splint allows you to, your tendon repair may break. If this happens you will need to have another operation to repair it.

You must wear the splint **all the time for 4 weeks**. Do not use your hand during this time.

Exercises

These exercises allow your repaired tendon to move and stop it from becoming stuck down by scar tissue.

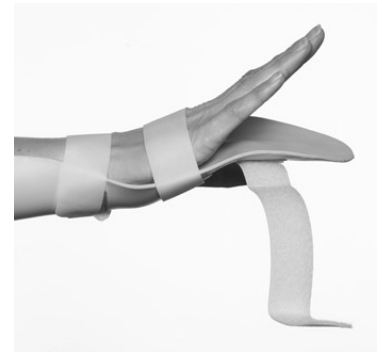
You will start your exercises soon after your operation. This is when you have either the plaster or the splint on.

You must do your exercises wearing the plaster or the splint.

Exercise 1:

1. Remove the top strap of your splint.
2. Straighten up your fingers as far as you are able.
3. Then return your fingers back down onto the splint.
4. Repeat 4 times.

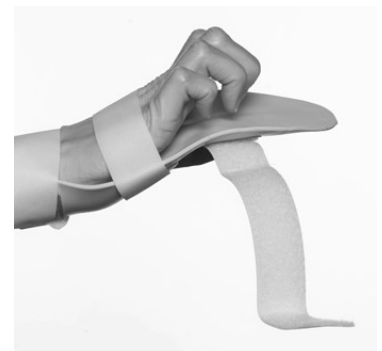
Carry out this exercise 4 times a day.



Exercise 2:

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

Carry out this exercise 4 times a day.



General advice

Activity

- 4 weeks after your operation you will be able to do light activity and just wear the splint at night. 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.
- We will give you specific advice 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

- Wound care will be done as needed at your appointments.
- You must keep your hand clean and dry to help your wound heal.
- Smoking can affect the circulation in your hand and slow down healing. Your physiotherapist, occupational therapist or doctor can give you advice about stopping smoking.
- Stitches are usually removed 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 stop your scar from becoming stuck down. This will help your movement.

Swelling

- It is normal to have some swelling in your hand after your operation.
- To reduce this try raising your hand above 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.
- It is also important to keep your elbow and shoulder moving normally whilst you recover.



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 surgeon 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.

The nerves in your finger can get damaged either at the time of your injury or during surgery. If this happens your finger may not feel normal. This may get better slowly or you may always have reduced feeling. Your therapist will give you advice about this.

Contact details:

Name of Occupational therapist:

Phone number:

Name of Physiotherapist:

Phone number:

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Previous reference: OT009-0812

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