

Aftercare for a flexor tendon repair to your hand

Occupational Therapy & Physiotherapy

Information for Patients

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Introduction

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

Flexor tendons run from muscles in your forearm, passing through a number of channels in your wrist and down the palm of your hand to each of your fingers and thumbs. Your flexor tendons allow you to bend your wrist and fingers, make a fist and grip objects.

Tendon repair

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

Tendon repair involves making a cut in your hand, finding the split or ends of the tendons and stitching the tendons back together. Repairing flexor tendons is difficult because they can be hard to get to. They are often close to important nerves.

Tendon healing and rehabilitation

Tendons need a long period of recovery (rehabilitation). This is because the repaired tendons will be weak and if you put too much stress, too early on the repair, it will cause it to break and fail. It will take 3 months for your tendon to heal properly and become as strong as it was before you injured it.

- You will need to attend therapy and follow a structured programme of rehabilitation.
- You will need to wear a hand splint to protect the tendon repair.
- You will need to do your exercises in the splint.
- The exercises need to be done every hour. This is to stop the repaired tendons from becoming stuck to nearby tissues.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

Your splint

Your splint has been moulded by your Occupational Therapist. It is in the best position to protect your tendon repair whilst still allowing you to do your exercises with it in place.

It is very important you **do not remove** your splint unless your therapist has told you to do so. They will show you how to do it safely.

If you remove your splint and move your fingers straighter than you are allowed to, your tendon repair is likely to break and you will need to have another operation.

You may be given a layer of stockinette to wear underneath your splint.

This will be given to you with an elasticated net to be worn over your fingers when you are not exercising.

This will remind you not to use your hand for everyday activities.



Exercises

The exercises are designed to get the tendons gliding and help to prevent them from getting stuck to surrounding tissues. This should help in getting movement back over the coming weeks/ months.

- Do your exercises **once an hour** when you are awake.
- Complete each exercise 5 times.
- It is important you are able to do your exercises. You may need to take painkillers to help.
- Do not over exercise believing that the more movement will help – it will not.

Remember, all the exercises must be done whilst wearing your splint.

Exercises

Exercise 1

Use your uninjured hand to bend each finger in turn, on your injured hand, into your palm. Make sure you bend all the joints, knuckle, middle joint and finger tip.

Allow your fingers to relax and return to rest back into the splint, **without the help of your other hand**.

Repeat for a total of 5 times for each finger.



Exercise 2

Bend all your fingers into your palm without the help of your other hand.

Try to bend all your finger joints during this exercise.

Allow your fingers to relax and return to rest back into the splint, without the help of your other hand.

Repeat for a total of 5 times.



Exercise 3

Straighten all your fingers up to the back of the splint, without the help of your other hand and then allow to relax.

Repeat for a total of 5 times.



Exercise 4

Move your shoulder and elbow as advised by your therapist. This is to reduce the stiffness at the joints and can help to prevent/reduce swelling.

General advice

Swelling - During the first 3 weeks you should aim to keep the hand above the heart level. This will help with circulation and to reduce the swelling. You should not walk around with your arm by your side. Use a sling if walking long distances but take it off indoors so your arm does not get stiff.

Smoking - if you smoke, it is highly recommended that you stop. Smoking can harm circulation in your hand, which can delay your recovery time. Your physiotherapist/occupational therapist/doctor can give you advice about stopping smoking.

Activity - you will need to avoid using your hand for **any** activities until 4 weeks after your operation. You will only be able to use your hand for very light activities after 4 weeks. How quickly you can return to work and go back to normal daily activities after this time will depend on the nature of your job, and the type and location of your injury. Your therapist will be able to advise you further. You will not be able to return to heavy activities and lifting until at least 12 weeks after our operation.

It is very important that you follow all the instructions and advice given to you about the use of your hands during your recovery. If you attempt to use the repaired tendons before they have fully healed, it could make them to split apart or break, causing you to have to have another operation.

Scars - Stiches will be taken out 10 to 14 days after your surgery by the nurse at the hospital or by your GP practice nurse. When the wound has healed, your therapist will work with you to help soften and flatten the scar and to help to prevent it from becoming stuck to the tissues underneath.

Driving - your therapist will advise you when you are allowed to safely return to driving but this would not be advised until at least 8 weeks after your operation.

What are the risks after surgery?

- The wound/tendon repair could become infected. You may be at a higher risk of infection if you damaged your tendon in a dirty environment. If your wound becomes hot, red more painful and leaks fluid contact your GP urgently.
- The tendon repair could fail, break or snap. If this occurs, you will usually notice that you cannot move your fingers in the way you did before. You may have also heard a 'snapping' sound. Tendon repairs usually break because you have not followed the advice given by the doctors and therapist. Sometimes it may be because you have fallen accidentally. If you feel your tendons have snapped, please contact your doctor urgently. Further surgery is usually required to repair the tendon.

- The tendons may become stuck to surrounding tissues. This may mean you have less movement at the hand/fingers.
- You may have damaged the nerves in your hand/fingers at the time of the accident. This will affect the feeling in your hands/fingers. This may get better gradually or you may always have reduced feeling/sensation in parts of your hand. Your therapists will talk to you about protecting your hand/fingers if you cannot feel them properly.

You will be given more leaflets with exercises that need to be done in weeks 3 and 4 along with the exercises you have been given after your surgery.

Contact details

Occupational Therapist: _____ Contact number: _____

Physiotherapist: _____ Contact 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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Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

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