

# Aftercare for a flexor tendon repair to your thumb

Hands Burns and Plastics Therapy

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 your forearm through your wrist and across the palm of your hand, allowing you to bend your fingers and thumb. (NHS.uk)

## Tendon repair

You have cut the tendon in your thumb. It has been repaired in surgery.

The surgeon makes a cut in your hand. They find the two ends of the tendon and stitch the tendons back together.

Repairing flexor tendons is difficult. They can be hard to get to and are often close to important nerves.

## Tendon healing and recovery

Tendons need a long period of recovery. The repaired tendons will be weak. The repair will break and fail if you put too much stress, too early, on it. 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 follow an exercise programme.

Your tendon repair will need to be protected with a hand splint.

You will need to do exercises every hour within the splint. This will stop the repaired tendons from becoming stuck to nearby tissues.

**Health information and support is available at [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)  
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit [www.uhleicester.nhs.uk](http://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](mailto:uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net)

## Your splint

Your splint has been made by your Therapist. It is in the best position to protect your tendon repair. It will let you do your exercises with it in place.

**You must not remove** your splint unless your therapist has told you to do so. Your therapist will show you the safest way to do this.

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



You will wear an elasticated net over your thumb when you are not exercising. This will remind you not to use your hand for everyday activities.



## Your exercises

Your therapist will teach you exercises. They will get you to practice these to make sure you can do them correctly. You will start your exercises soon after your operation. 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.

You will need to do your exercises **every hour** when you are awake. You need to do each exercise 5 times. **Do not** over exercise believing that the more movement will help– it will not!

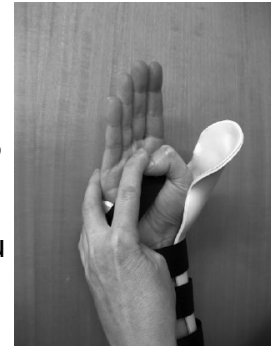
It is important you are able to do your exercises. You may need to take pain killers at first to help you to do them.

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

## Exercises

### Exercise 1

1. Use your uninjured hand to bend your thumb, into your palm. Make sure you bend both the joints at the thumb during this exercise. Hold for 3 to 5 seconds.
2. Let your thumb relax and return to rest back into the splint. Do not use your other hand to help it.
3. **Repeat 5 times**



### Exercise 2

1. Bend your thumb into your palm. Try to bend all your joints at the thumb during this exercise.
2. Do not overstrain, 50% effort is enough to make the tendons glide
3. Let your thumb to relax and return to rest back into the splint.
4. **Repeat 5 times.**



### Exercise 3

1. Straighten your thumb up to the hood of the splint and then let it relax.
2. **Repeat 5 times.**



Move your shoulder and elbow as advised by your therapist. This is to reduce the stiffness at the joints. It 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 to assist the circulation and reduce the swelling. You should not walk around with your arm hanging by your side. Use a sling if walking long distances. Take it off indoors so your arm does not get stiff.

**Smoking:** If you smoke, it is highly recommended that you stop. Smoking affects circulation in your hand. It will delay your recovery time (NHS.uk). Your therapist/ doctor can give you advice about stopping smoking.



**Activity:** You must avoid using your hand for **any** activities until 4 weeks after your operation. After 4 weeks you will be able to use your hand for very light activities. How quickly you can return to work and resume normal daily activities after this time will depend on your job. It will also the type and location of your injury. Your therapist will be able to advise you. 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. You will need another operation.

**Driving:** Your therapist will advise you when you are allowed to safely drive again. It is advised to wait til at least 8 weeks after your operation.

## Are there any risks?

- Your 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 or your surgical team urgently.
- Your tendon repair could fail, break or snap. If this occurs, you will usually notice that you cannot move your thumb in the way you did before. You may have also heard/felt a 'snapping'. If you think your tendons have snapped, please contact your doctor urgently. Further surgery is usually needed to repair the tendon.
- Your tendons may become stuck to surrounding tissues. This may mean you have less movement at the thumb in the future.
- You may have damaged the nerves in your hand/thumb at the time of the accident. This will affect the feeling in your hands/thumb. This may get better slowly or you may always have less feeling in parts of your hand. Your therapists will teach you how to protect your hand/thumb if you cannot feel them properly.

## Contact numbers:

Therapist name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔  
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Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email [uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net](mailto:uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net)