

Thumb Flexor Tendon Repair

Information for patients



Introduction

You have had surgery to repair one or more of the tendons which bend your thumb. This booklet is designed to help you understand your ongoing care and treatment.

Following the procedure your forearm and hand will be in a large bandage with a plaster-of-Paris splint. **DO NOT REMOVE THIS.**

DO NOT try use your hand at all. You may have a small amount of room for movement within the dressing.

Swelling

To minimise swelling you must elevate (raise) your hand.

Keep your hand above the level of your heart at all times during the first few weeks.

When sitting or lying you should use pillows to support it, especially when you sleep.

When you are out and about use your arm muscles to hold your arm across your chest to the opposite shoulder.

Time off work

Depending on your job we would advise:

Type of Work / Activity	Approximate time off
Office based	6-8 weeks
Driving	8 weeks
Manual work	10-12 weeks
Sport	12 weeks

If you need a 'fit note' or sick note, please visit your GP.

Referral to Hand Therapy

- You will be telephoned to be given an appointment. The appointment will be within 3-5 days of the operation.
- If you have not heard anything approximately 5 days after your operation please contact the hand therapy department on (01865) 231181.
- The appointment will be on Level LG1 in the West Wing, follow signs to 'Plastics Outpatients'

What to expect in Hand Therapy

- The first appointment will last approximately 1hr
- The dressings from theatre will be removed
- Your wound will be looked at, cleaned and re-dressed
- A lighter plastic splint will be made to fit you.
- You will be taught very specific exercises to perform in the splint (see Page 4 in this booklet)

Splint Care (once you have been made a plastic splint)

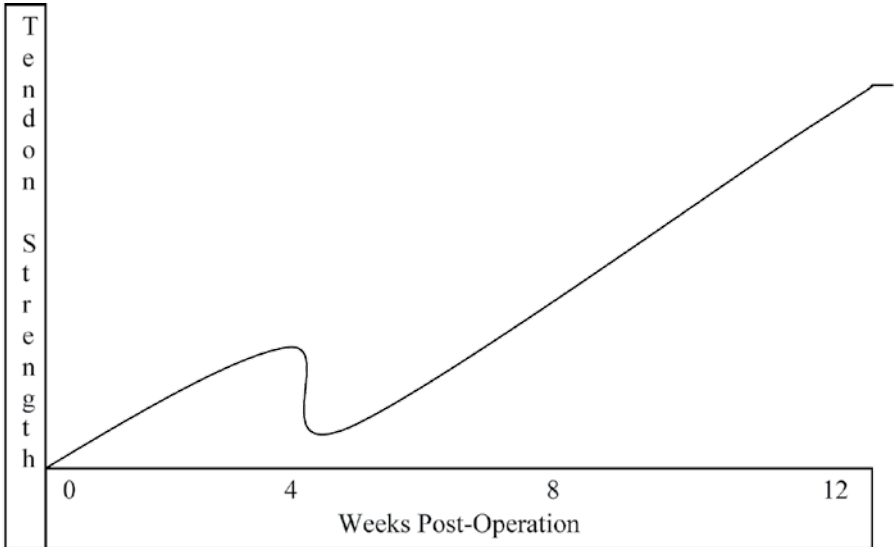
- Do not place the splint in hot water or near a heater
- Check your skin regularly for red/ pressure areas using the safe technique shown to you by your physiotherapist. Contact your therapist if this occurs.
- Use a plastic bag over the whole arm when in the bath or shower (DO NOT take the splint off to bathe)

Scar Massage

Start when your stitches have been removed and the wound looks dry.

- Use a simple moisturiser e.g. Aqueous cream or E45 over your scar.
- Rub over your scar to encourage the skin to move normally
- You can also do some massage without moisturiser
- Perform this 3-4 x day for 3-5 minutes

Figure to demonstrate healing time of tendons correlating to Stage of rehab



Thumb FLEXOR Tendons Rehab Programme

You will be guided through each stage by your physiotherapist. **Do not** move onto the next stage without instruction to do so.

Stage 1 (3-5 days post -op)

Early active movement exercises:

Perform 3 repetitions of the following exercises every 2 hours:

1. Use your good hand to curl your thumb away from the splint towards the base of your little finger then use your muscle power straighten thumb back to touch your nail to the splint.



2. Repeat exercise as above but try to keep your thumb in the bent position using your muscles as you let go with your other hand. Use your muscle power straighten thumb back to touch your nail to the splint.



3. Support the base of the thumb. Use your muscle power to bend the tip of the thumb and straighten fully.



These exercises help to prevent your tendons becoming stuck in your scar tissue and ensure that once healed you will have the best possible function/outcome.

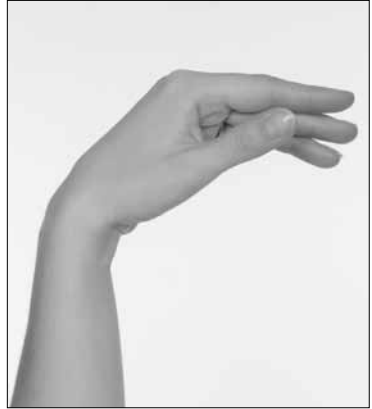
Stage 2 (4 weeks)

Progressing towards Full Active Range of Movement

Sit in a safe environment and remove your splint. Rest your elbow on a table and let your fingers and thumb relax.

- A) Allow your wrist to flex forwards

Note how the fingers and thumb relax into a straighter position, check yours do too.



- B) Then, keeping your fingers floppy, extend your wrist back.

Again check that your fingers and thumb are relaxing into a curled position.



Repeat 5x every 2 hours

Put your splint back on after these exercises

Stage 3 (5-6 weeks)

You may now start to wean from the splint. Use your hand for light activities such as washing, dressing and eating.

Light activities	Medium activities	Heavy activities
Using the telephone	Painting and decorating	Using a knife
Handling money	Ring-pull on can	Ironing
Playing cards	Using towels	Hoovering
Zips	Using fork and spoon	Lifting children
Light clothes	Putting on socks, tights	Lifting boxes, carrying shopping
Shoe laces	Hanging washing out	Making a bed
Personal care, washing, make-up	Washing up, wiping up	Hand washing
Dusting	Sweeping up	Gardening
Writing, signing your name	Reading books	Driving a car
Light switch	Holding a glass	Cleaning a car
Using remote control	Using scissors	Cooking, lifting a saucepan, kettle
Reading the newspaper	Combing hair	Using a tin opener
	Shaving	Sports: rugby, football, swimming, golf
	Buttons	
	Unscrewing jar lids	
	Holding a cup	
	Holding a pint glass	

Make sure you wear your splint at night and outdoors.

Stage 4 (6-8 weeks)

If you have managed all the previous stages you may now discard the splint.

Start to increase the use of your hand to performing moderate activities e.g. opening doors, holding a glass and washing-up.

(See table on page 7)

Stage 5 (8 weeks)

If you are able to make a full fist at this stage, you are able to start driving. If you are unsure then check first with your physiotherapist.

You should now gradually progress your activities, working on increasing your strength and function towards full activities at 12 weeks.

Stage 6

It may be that at this stage further hand therapy and/or splinting is required to regain full range of movement and/or function.

Hand Therapy Appointment Record

Your Physiotherapist will be

Day	Date	Time

If you are unable to attend, please inform the department as soon as possible.

Hand Therapy Department Telephone: 01865 231181

Thank you.

Directions to Hand Therapy Department

We are situated on Level LG1 of the West Wing. Turn right out of the lifts and follow the blue signs to ENT & Plastics Outpatients.

Hand Therapy Department Telephone: **01865 231181**
8am-4.30pm

This telephone is in a clinical area therefore you may be required to leave an answer machine message and we will return your call as soon as possible.

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473** or email **PALSJR@ouh.nhs.uk**

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