

Discharge Advice for patients after Surgery for Dupuytren's Contracture

Information for patients, relatives and carers

① Help and advice

If you have any problems after discharge please contact
one of the numbers on page 20

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What should I do when I get home?

Keep your hand elevated, this will help with pain relief, control bleeding in the first 24 hours and soft tissue swelling over the next few weeks. We will give you a sling to wear to help you over the first week.

The bulky bandage helps prevent bleeding in the wound after your operation and blood clots collecting under the skin (haematoma) and reduces the risk of post-operative complications such as wound infection.

This bandage needs to stay in place until you are seen in clinic. This will be one to two weeks after surgery. We will give you instructions covering exercises and skin care you have to start once the wound has healed.

You will need to come back to the hospital or outpatient clinic to get your stitches removed.

When should I seek urgent advice?

Please contact or attend your local emergency department if you have any of the following signs:

- Swelling or tingling “pins and needles” in your hand that is not relieved by raising it, exercises or loosening the bandage
- Your fingers remain white, blue, cold or numb
- You have pain that does not go away after pain relief or exercise

Infection

If you think you have an infection in your wound, please phone to be seen earlier in clinic or seek advice from your GP or Practice Nurse. Signs of infection include:

- You feel generally unwell or feverish
- Have a temperature
- Increased redness, swelling and pain around the wound which feels hard when you touch it
- A cloudy or smelly discharge from your wound
- The wound does not seem to be healing properly

When do my stitches come out?

Your stitches will be removed after 10-14 days during one of your follow up appointments. You may also be fitted with a splint to help maintain correction and given instructions how to use the splint.

Do I need further follow up appointments?

You may need other follow up appointments for dressing changes. This may be because your wound has not healed, or if there is concern over how easily you are going to regain movements. We may also suggest a further follow up appointment for about six weeks' time to check that you have recovered and do not need further treatment. If you have been told you need a follow-up and have not had appointment before discharge you will be sent a letter. If you have been told to expect a letter but have not heard anything in one week please contact:

Orthopaedic Out patients
Tel: 01904 726325

Orthopaedic Clinic
Tel: 01904 726627

Bridlington: Phone your consultant's secretary through the hospital switchboard (01723 368111).

What can I do to help my recovery?

After surgery a therapy programme of massage, wound care, skin care and exercises will continue for up to six months. Some patients may benefit from wearing a splint to maintain or improve the straightness of your fingers. You will only usually need to wear it at night but some patients prefer to wear it for short periods during the day. The splint will be custom made for you and can be adjusted as your recovery progresses.

What exercises do I need to do?

Carry out the exercises as follows; these will help your recovery.

It is normal to get some swelling in your hand and/or fingers after hand surgery.

Swelling can delay wound healing because it stops circulation from taking nutrients to the wound to help in the healing process. It can also make infections more likely. Swelling restricts movement of the fingers and joints. If swelling continues it can cause joint stiffness in the long term.

To keep swelling to a minimum:

1. Always rest with your hand higher than your elbow
2. When walking, do not hang your arm by your side for more than a minute at a time

It is very important that you start the following exercises as soon as you have had your operation. These exercises work the small muscles in your hand returning the blood to the heart and helping reduce the swelling in the soft tissues. It also helps to stop the finger joints becoming stiff.

For the first one to two weeks you will have your pressure bandage on. This will make the exercises more difficult to do. It is very important that you attempt all the exercises whilst you have your bandage on. When your bandage is removed, the exercises will get easier.

Exercises from day one

As soon as you can feel your hand, within the confines of the bandage, bend and straighten the joints of your fingers that stick out from your bandage. Depending on the length of your wounds, the full length of your fingers may need to be covered.

Carry out the following exercises (take your sling off first)

- every 30 minutes during the day;
- Over the next two weeks.

Put your arm straight up in the air, just as you would if you wanted to ask a question in an audience. If you have a problem with your shoulder, take your arm up as high as you can and repeat exercises one to three as much as your bandage permits.



Then pull the wrist backwards and complete the following actions whilst maintaining this wrist position. Return to this position after each of these exercises.



1. Bend the larger knuckles but keep the fingers straight



2. Bend the end two finger joints

3. Pull all the joints down to make a fist. This may be difficult when you still have the bulky dressing in place but try and bend your fingers as far as you can. You could use your other hand to help.



4.



Spread your fingers
and thumb as wide
as you can.
Hold and repeat
5 -10 times



Then close the
fingers together and
squeeze tightly
Hold and repeat
5 -10 times

Relax your fingers

Do not worry about your stitches; they will not be affected by the exercises.

Doing all these exercises should only take a few minutes. Please continue with them after your bandage and stitches have been removed.

Additional exercises

These should be carried out after your follow up appointment a week to two weeks after your operation and are discussed with you when the therapist sees you at follow up.

Remember; Swelling restricts movement these exercises are aimed at increasing movement and reducing swelling.

It is important to do these exercises for the recovery of your hand even when your hand is painful. Keep your hand up most of the time.

If the pain prevents you from doing these fully, take the painkillers you have been given on a regular basis.

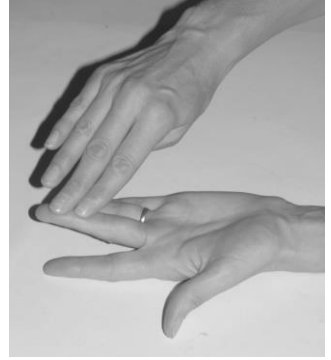
The pain should improve as swelling goes down and the range of movement improves.

You need to continue with the elevation and the exercises you were asked to do whilst in the bandage following your operation, in addition to the following exercises.

All exercises should be done at regular intervals during the day. **Little and often**; once a day is not enough to achieve a good result following the operation.

Straightening the finger

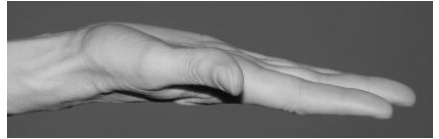
Sit with a flat surface in front or to the side of you. Place your hand palm uppermost. Push your fingers towards the surface you are resting on. If the affected finger does not go flat, take it as far as it will go, then using your other hand apply a stretch between the two creases in your finger at and above the middle joint.



Hold for a count of 10 then release.

Repeat five to 10 times.

Now repeat the movement, but try to make the fingers go out as straight as they can by themselves. Hold for a count of three. If the big knuckles in your hand are bending back too far, support them with your other hand.



Repeat five to 10 times.

Making a fist with the affected hand

Break this down into the bending of the different finger joints.

With your arm resting flat on a table, palm facing down, **allow your wrist to pull back towards you as you bend the finger joints.** Bend the big knuckle joints in your fingers, keeping the middle and end joints straight.



Repeat five to 10 times.

With the hand held up, bend all the big knuckle joints at the base of the fingers together to 90 degrees or as far as they go easily.



If they are stiff, take them as far as they will go and then apply slight pressure using the other hand, as you have been shown, to put an additional stretch on the joints hold for a count of five then release. If the fingers are very stiff, bend the fingers as far as they will go and instead of a stretch, bounce the fingers using the other hand, three to four times as they become easier to move then add the stretch.

Repeat this exercise for the middle finger joints. In the first week, you are aiming to get the pulp of the fingers to the palm of the hand.

Now make a full fist with all of your fingers.



Hook grip: keeping the big knuckle joints straight, bend the middle, and end joints in your fingers to 'hook' over. Aim to touch the base of your finger with its fingertip. If swelling is present in the fingers it will take time to achieve this.



Repeat five to 10 times

Milking exercise

Do not do this exercise until the stitches have been removed.

Hold your hand up; wrap the fingers of your opposite hand around the affected finger, squeeze and release.

After a couple of squeezes, stroke the finger with firm pressure between your index finger and thumb down to the palm twice.



Repeat five to 10 times

Continue to elevate your hand when resting and walking in order to reduce swelling.

Who should I contact if I have any problems with my exercises?

If you have any problems with these instructions or you would like more information please ring one of the following:

Advanced Practitioner Hand Surgery:	01904 725978
Hand Physiotherapist:	01904 725390
Kent Ward (Bridlington Hospital)	01262 423110

Skincare

Once your stitches have been removed you will be advised by the therapist on skin care. Normally the surface of your skin rubs off with washing and use. After surgery this builds up into a dry, hard layer. This needs to be softened with the use of hand cream two to three times a day, once the wound has healed. Softening the surface of the skin helps the soft tissues move and aids the shedding of the surface skin layer.

Use the tip of the thumb on the opposite hand, whilst applying hand cream, using slight pressure within the limits of comfort. Without lifting the pressure off, move the thumb in a circular movement.

Spend 30 seconds in each spot. Cover the line of the scar as well as the tissues either side of the scar. This activity helps to disperse any swelling of the soft tissue in addition to softening the scar tissue.

The surface skin starts to separate along the line of the cut before lifting off. In some hands the layer of skin can be very thick and some people worry that the wound is opening, if there is no bleeding or discharge it is probably just the surface of the skin starting to lift off.

The surface layer usually starts to lift after two weeks following surgery, but it can vary from person to person.

If once the surface layer has started to lift and you find the edges irritating do not pull the skin off. If it is not ready to lift it is likely to be very sore, you could create another wound by breaking the skin and making it bleed. Either trim the skin level with the surface of the hand or finger or ask someone to do this for you.

Remember to carry out any exercises you have been asked to do in addition to this skin care. By removing the dry skin you will help the movement of soft tissue underneath it.

What else can I do to help my hand heal after surgery?

It is normal for you to get some swelling following hand or upper arm surgery. Some patients are more likely to get swelling than others.

If you have swelling, it may be very tender especially when pressure is applied to the area. You could also have 'pins and needles' in your fingers.

Opening doors, holding knives and forks and using certain types of taps can be painful to use, this is normal.

Once your skin is healed, you can help to disperse the swelling by using the following massage technique two to three times a day

Massage

Use the tip of your thumb on the opposite hand, then using slight pressure within the limits of comfort, without lifting the pressure off, move the thumb in a circular movement. You can use hand cream to help with comfort.

Spend 20 seconds in each area and push swelling away from the hand. Cover the line of the scar as well as the tissues which are swollen either side of the scar.

This activity helps to disperse any swelling of the soft tissue in addition to softening the scar tissue.

Therapy

It will also help the recovery of the swelling if you continue with the post-op exercises you were given to do at the time of your discharge.

The time it takes for swelling to settle is very variable, it can take several months to disappear completely.

Contrast bathing

Get two bowls of water, one with hot water as hot as you can bear, the second bowl with iced water. Immerse your hand in the hot water for 30 seconds and then switch to the iced water for another 30 seconds. Repeat this until the waters get to room temperature. This stimulates the circulation in your hand.

How soon can I resume my normal activities?

You will usually need to take two weeks off work while your stiches are in place as you need to keep your hand dry and will you will have dressings in place. You may require a longer time off work especially if you do heavy or manual work. You may need to discuss this with your employer or occupational health team.

Because the bulky dressings cover most of your hand, you will need help with jobs such as shopping and cooking for the first few weeks. You will have dressings in place for at least two weeks and your wounds will be continuing to heal.

Any delay in healing may change this plan you will be able to discuss this with the hand team at clinic appointments.

When can I start driving again?

Driving your car is not advisable until the bulky bandage is removed and your wound has healed a little. You may need to wait until your stitches are removed. As a licence holder you are responsible for only driving when you feel confident that you are safe to drive. You will need to be able to do an emergency stop without damage to your wound. You are also advised to check with your insurance company when you will be covered to drive again after your operation. If the condition of your hand prevents you from driving safely, you must not drive.

What should I do if I have any problems or worries about my operation after going home?

In the first 24 hours following your operation, please telephone the following, depending on where you were treated:

York

Day Unit 01904 726010
(between 7.30am and 7.30pm)
or
The nurses on the 01904 726537
Orthopaedic outpatient clinic

Out of hours contact:

Extended Stay Unit 01904 721265
(overnight Mon-Thurs)
Ward 29 (Fri - Sun) 01904 726029

Bridlington

Kent Ward 01262 423110
Or phone your consultant's secretary through the hospital switchboard (01723 368111) to make an appointment.

If you have problems out of hours or more than 24 hours after your operation, please contact your GP or attend your local emergency department if serious.

York emergency department: 01904 726587
Scarborough A&E department: 01723 387111

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Jayne Lenighan, Advanced Nurse Practitioner,
Hand Surgery, Orthopaedics, The York Hospital,
Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE or telephone
01904 725978.

Teaching, training and research

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PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

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Owner	Jayne Lenighan, Advanced Nurse Practitioner
Date first issued	June 2016
Review Date	October 2024
Version	3 (reissued October 2021)
Approved by	Orthopaedic MDT
Document Reference	PIL 1161 v3.2

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