

# Discharge Advice for patients after Carpal Tunnel Surgery

Information for patients, relatives and carers

## **① Help and advice**

If you have any problems after discharge please contact  
one of telephone numbers on page 14



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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 three days.

Please remove the cotton wool and crepe pressure bandage after three days from today.

Keep the stitches covered with a dry dressing, do not get this dressing wet. If your dressing gets wet please change it straight away. This will lower the chance of a wound infection.

If you do have a wound infection, you may have these symptoms:

- Increasing pain
- Increasing swelling
- Heat around the wound
- Redness of the skin around the area of the wound
- You may feel unwell
- You have a high temperature
- Discharge from the wound which may have an unpleasant smell.
- The wound doesn't seem to be healing properly.

If you have three or more of the above, seek advice from us. See contact numbers on page 13.

## **When do my stitches come out?**

You need to arrange to have your stitches removed after 10-14 days at your GP practice. Please ring in plenty of time in case your surgery is busy. Please tell the nurse that your stitches are: continuous / interrupted (nurse to delete where appropriate).

## **Do I need a follow up appointment?**

We may give you a follow up appointment for about six weeks' time. 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 two weeks please contact:

Orthopaedic Appointments

Tel: 01904 726627

Accident and Emergency Reception (out of hours)

Tel 01904 726588

Bridlington patients should phone their consultant's secretary through the hospital switchboard (01723 368111).

# What can I do to help my recovery?

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 three days 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.

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

- As soon as you get home
- every 30 minutes
- over the next two weeks

Put your arm straight up in the air 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

#### 4. Repeat 10 times



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.

## **To prevent the nerve getting stuck**

Once the bandage is removed, three times a day you should stretch your arm out to the side and then bend your wrist backwards, until it is uncomfortable then relax.

## **To prevent the scar getting too tight**

Once the skin is healed, you should massage the scar with cream e.g. E45, or whatever suits your skin. This helps to remove the dry skin which will become harder if not moisturised, it will then act as a splint preventing the soft tissues from moving easily. You should also stretch your thumb and fingers out to their fullest extent at least three times a day.

Swelling at the base of the hand around the site of the incision is normal. The degree of swelling varies greatly from one person to another. It can result in the affected area feeling painful. If this happens to you, we will show you at your follow up appointment a massage technique to help disperse it. It should settle given time.

The recovery of pins and needles varies from patient to patient. For some patients it can be an instant improvement. In others it can take several weeks, and as much as 12 weeks. You may not have full return of sensation and the amount of sensation that returns depends on how long you have had the symptoms for before surgery and how bad your condition was at the time of surgery.

## **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
Reception of Clifton Park Clinic (Chapel):	01904 721963
Hand Physiotherapist:	01904 725390
Kent Ward (Bridlington Hospital)	01262 423110

## **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 one to two weeks off work unless you do heavy manual work where you might need longer.

Because the bulky dressings cover most of your hand, you will need help with jobs such as shopping and cooking for a few days.

## **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.

# **Who should I contact if I have any urgent 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.

If you have any non-urgent questions or concerns about your recovery, please contact your hand practitioner or physiotherapist.

## **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**

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

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](mailto:pals@york.nhs.uk).

An answer phone is available out of hours.

# Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

Please telephone or email if you require this information in a different language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio.

如果你要求本資 不同的 或 式提供，電  
或發電

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Telephone: 01904 725566

Email: [access@york.nhs.uk](mailto:access@york.nhs.uk)

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