

# Digital Nerve Injuries

## Introduction

A digital nerve provides sensation to one side of the thumb or finger. Each digit has two digital nerves running along each side, which are only around one millimetre in diameter. If the nerve is injured, surgery may be required to repair the nerve and improve the chance of sensation returning to the finger.

## Surgical Treatment

A nerve injury is repaired by joining the two cut ends of the nerve with stitches using a microscope. Even after the nerve has been repaired, the sensation in your finger will not feel normal. A nerve takes time to recover, and this can be up to three to six months for a digital nerve. You will have a small surgical wound with stitches, and this will be covered by a dressing initially. Your stitches will normally be removed 10-14 days after surgery by a nurse at your GP practice or in the Hand Therapy unit.

## Non-surgical treatment

A decision may be made to clean and stitch the injury wound without repairing the nerve injury particularly if very close to the tip of the finger, as the very tips of your finger regain enough sensation from the uninjured nerve on the other side. There are newer techniques being investigated at present including using special conduits, or even suture-less repairs. Your hand surgeon may discuss being a participant in a research trial as part of this endeavour to find out if one treatment is superior to another.

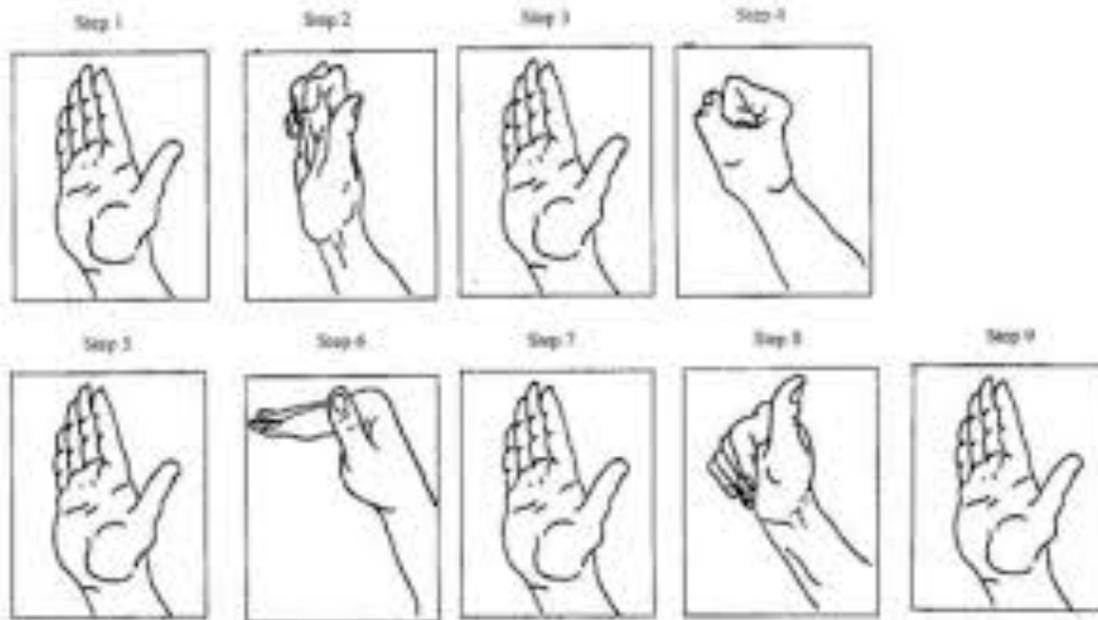
## Skin Care

Whilst the nerve regrows you will have an area of skin in the thumb or finger affected that you cannot feel properly (numbness). You will not be able to feel pain in this area, so you are at a greater risk of burning or cutting the skin on your finger. Please take additional care to look after your finger until the sensation begins to recover. Equally this area is prone to cracking or getting dry, and simple moisturisers may be helpful to address this.

## Hand Therapy

- Swelling – elevate your hand above heart level as much as possible to reduce any swelling in the hand.
- Exercises – it is important to exercise your joints to prevent stiffness. Please do the movements below, do not remove your splint if you have been provided with one. Simply undo the top strapping to allow you to bend the top two joints.

## PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET



- Splinting - sometimes a thermoplastic splint is made for you to help protect your repaired nerve. It is important you wear the splint at all times for two weeks after surgery to protect the repair. The splint is to prevent to finger from *over-straightening*, but it is still possible to bend the finger as advised to prevent stiffness. Try to take care of this until the sensation starts to return.

### **How long will I be off work and when can I drive?**

Please liaise with your treating clinician for further advice if unsure. It is your responsibility to ensure you are safe to drive with your splint on and we advise you to discuss the matter with your insurance provider. In general, before returning to driving, we recommend that you are able to make a full pain free fist, be able to grip the steering wheel and perform an emergency stop manoeuvre without any distracting pain.

You will be able to do most everyday activities with your splint or strapping on. You may be able to work with your splint on, but this will depend on your job. You should not start any sporting activities until you are told by your treating clinician it is safe to do so or you may further damage your finger.



## Complications

- Incomplete recovery of sensation
- Cold sensitivity
- Wound Infection
- Scar tenderness
- Neuroma
- Stiffness
- A pain syndrome (rare)

## Further information

The day surgery unit can be contacted on 02476 966861 / 02476 966868 (University Hospital), or on 01788 663264 (Hospital of St. Cross). For further information please visit our hand service's web site at [www.tinyurl.com/uhcwhand](http://www.tinyurl.com/uhcwhand), or contact:

- Hand Therapy at University Hospital Coventry & Warwickshire on 02476 966016
- Hand Therapy at Hospital of St. Cross, Rugby on 01788 663257
- Our specialist hand surgery nurse / hand-coordinator on 02476 965072

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 02476 966861 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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