

Finger fusion – DIP joint

A joint fusion is an operation that involves removing the damaged ends of the joint and compressing them together until the bone has grown across the joint and the joint is stiff.

What is the cause

Finger fusions are often performed for pain caused by arthritis. The most common joint to be fused is the distal interphalangeal joint (DIP joint). This is the end finger joint, just behind the nail.

Symptoms

People often present with a painful, lumpy joint and stiffness. The articular or joint cartilage on the ends of the bone wears away, and the exposed bones rub against each other, causing pain. A small joint fusion which stiffens the joint can be very successful at reducing this pain. There are very few functional limitations as a consequence of fusing the DIP joint.

Treatment (surgery)

The surgery usually takes place under general anaesthetic, under X-ray control. An incision is made on the back of the joint. The tendons are divided and the underlying bone prepared so that the two ends of the bone are freshened and come into close contact. These are then held with a variety of fixation devices, most commonly stainless steel wires or screws. The wires are kept in place until the bone has united, usually somewhere between four and eight weeks. There are a number of different methods of fixation of the DIP joint and these include exposed wires, buried wires under the skin or internal screw fixation.

What are the possible complications

The main risk is the bones not fusing together. This may mean further surgery is needed to try and achieve fusion. This occurs in approximately 10% of cases. Other risks are infection and damage to the nail.

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

You can expect to return to work within a few weeks of surgery depending upon the nature of your job. Jobs involving heavy work may require you to remain off work for up to six weeks. You may find driving difficult during the first few weeks after the operation. Before attempting to drive you should be able to make a complete fist and grip a hard surface without pain (e.g. grip the back of a dining chair).



PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

Further information

Further information sheets will be available to you when you leave the hospital, please ask staff for a copy of:

- Post-operative Hand and Arm instructions
- Care following a general anaesthetic

In the event of you experiencing any problems please contact your GP or the Day Surgery Unit.

For further information on your procedure please contact:

- the Day Surgery Unit on 024 7696 6861 or 024 7696 6868
- the Day Surgery Unit St Cross Hospital Rugby on 01788 663264

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6861 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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