

Hand Therapy

Thumb Flexor Tendon Repair

You have undergone surgery to repair the tendon(s) that bend your thumb. It will take around 12 weeks for your tendon to be strong enough to return to function normally.

Early Stage (0-6 weeks)

Splint

For the first six weeks the tendon repair is very delicate and can be easily undone. To protect the repair you will be provided with a splint. This splint stops you straightening your thumb fully which could cause the tendon to re-rupture. **You should wear the splint 24 hours a day** and not use the hand to do any heavy functional tasks, as this could cause the tendon to rupture. You should also avoid hanging or carrying anything from the splint/arm.

You should not drive with your splint on or remove your splint to do so. Driving either with or without your splint puts you at significant risk of rupturing your tendon(s). To drive with your splint on also puts yourself, any passengers and other motorists at risk as you will not have adequate control of the vehicle. You should not drive until at least 8 weeks after your tendon repair.

If your splint is uncomfortable speak to your therapist who can remould or alter your splint. The splint is made out of thermoplastic material which softens when hot so do not expose it to any form of heat.



Patient Information

Wound

Keep your dressing dry and clean at all times. If the dressing gets wet or if you are concerned about your wound contact your GP.

Once your stitches are removed and your wound is fully healed you should start massaging the scar with a water based moisturiser for example E45, Aqueous cream. This is an important part of your treatment, as it will help prevent the scar tissue sticking to the tendon. This could result in the limited movement of the thumb.

Swelling

To minimise swelling keep your hand raised as much as possible.

Exercises

Gentle movement of the tendon also helps to limit scar tissue sticking to the tendon and will begin to gently strengthen the tendon. You should complete only the exercises advised and at the frequency advised. Doing too many exercises may cause inflammation and the formation of extra scar tissue. Doing too few may cause stiffness and adhesions.

Remove the netting around the thumb and complete the following exercises every hour.....repetitions of each:

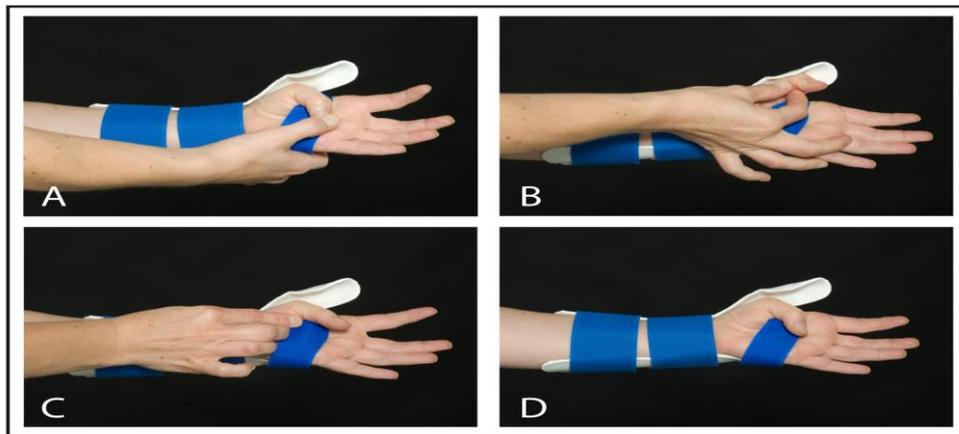
A. Using your other hand bend the thumb across the hand towards the base of the little finger

B. With your fingers at the side of the joint gently bend and straighten the top joint of the thumb. It is very important your fingers are at the side and not the front of the joint. Putting your finger in front of the joint creates resistance which can cause the tendon to rupture.

C. Gently bend the second joint of the thumb and straighten back to the splint

D. Gently bend both joints of the thumb as far as possible towards the base of the little finger

Patient Information



Late Stage (6-12 weeks)

By six weeks your tendon repair has gained sufficient strength to progress into a different stage of treatment. The repaired tendon however takes 12 weeks to be strong enough to function normally. You will therefore still need to follow some precautions.

Splints

You will no longer need to wear your splint. Additional splints may be provided to help regain movement. Your therapist will discuss this with you and provide any splint as appropriate.

Exercises

You are now allowed to move the thumb and wrist actively through their full range of movement. However you should not try to stretch the thumb and wrist fully back until eight weeks after the surgery.

Continue to complete the exercises you were given after surgery. Your therapist will advise you on additional exercises according to your individual need.

Scar

You should continue to massage your scar and apply any silicone gel or elastomer already provided, as the scar tissue remains active. You may also be given ultrasound treatment if the scar continues to restrict movement of the tendon.

Patient Information

Function

You can begin to use your thumb in light functional tasks for example fastening buttons or lifting a full cup. At eight weeks you can increase the use of your hand and resume driving. You should however avoid lifting anything very heavy or gripping very tightly until 12 weeks after surgery when the tendon is strong enough to withstand this.

Your therapist will offer any further advice or treatment to help you return to maximum function after your surgery.

Further Information

Please speak to your therapist regarding any information in this leaflet or contact us:

Telephone: 024 7696 6013 for physiotherapy at **University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire**

Telephone 01788 663257 for physiotherapy at **St Cross Hospital Rugby**

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