

## Patient Information



# Upper Limb Unit: Hand Therapy

## Thumb Flexor Tendons (Early Stage)

### Introduction

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

### Splint

For the first five 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.

### 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. This is an important part of your treatment as it will help prevent the scar tissue sticking to the



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tendon; this could result in the limited movement of the thumb.

### **Swelling**

To minimise swelling keep your hand raised as much as possible whilst in the splint. This is especially important in the first 2 weeks after your operation.

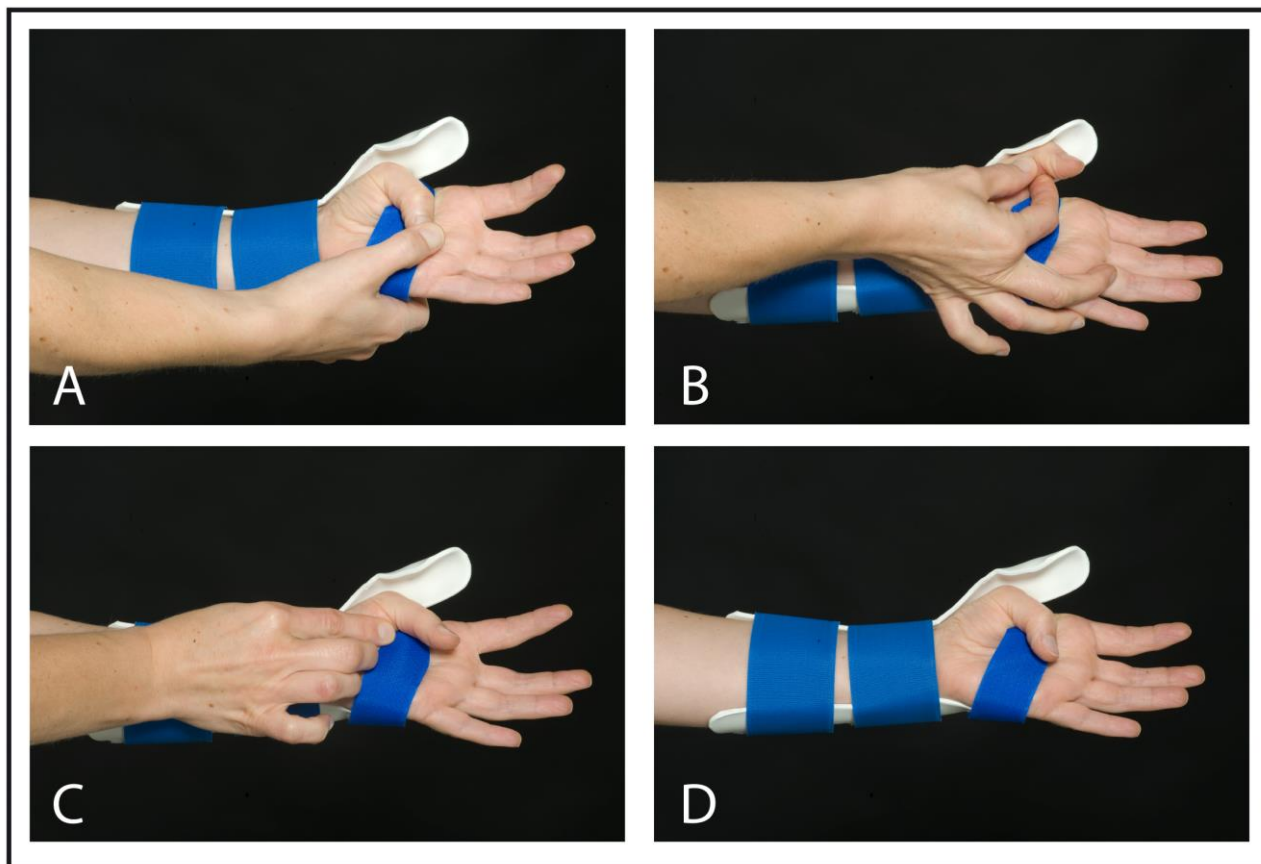
### **Exercises**

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, swelling and the formation of extra scar tissue. Doing too few may cause stiffness and adhesions.

Remove the netting/strap 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.

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### Further Information

If you need further information please contact your Therapy Department:

**University Hospital, Coventry and Warwickshire: Tel 024 7696 6016**

**Rugby, St Cross Hospital: Tel 01788 663257** For further information please visit our hand service web site <http://tinyurl.com/uhcwhand>

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact us on 024 7696 6016 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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### Document History

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