

Trauma and Orthopaedics

General advice following hand or wrist surgery

After an operation or injury to the wrist or hand, you may be unable to use the hand fully for some time. The following information has been written to help you plan and learn how to manage your everyday tasks one-handed.

If you have a date planned for surgery, think ahead. You may need to ask for the following help:

- Preparing meals
- Housework
- Transport while you are unable to drive (e.g. returning home or attending future appointments)
- Childcare

General tips

- Remember that you may not be able to write clearly, or sign cheques if your dominant hand is operated on.
- Ask someone to loosen tight containers, such as coffee jars.
- Get help in opening medication containers. You may need to leave these open but out of the reach of children.
- A shoulder bag or rucksack may be useful, so that your uninjured hand is free to use.



Patient Information

Washing

- Cover the hand with a tied plastic bag, securely taped high up on the arm while washing. Do not leave this on for any longer than necessary to prevent the wound from 'sweating.' Alternatively, keep arm out of the water whilst showering or bathing.
- You may want to self-source a professional water-resistant garment for the finger, hand, or whole arm. Further information can be found at <https://limboproducts.co.uk>. Paper leaflets from the company are available from the plaster rooms both at University Hospital and Hospital of St. Cross.
- If you cannot dry your back, use a towelling dressing gown.
- Use a non-slip mat in the bath or shower.
- Long handled sponges may help.
- Flip-top lids or pump dispensers are easier to use than a screw top bottle for soap and shampoo.
- Consider an electric toothbrush or razor.

Dressing

- Choose wide-sleeved shirts, or tops with loose cuffs.
- Slip-on shoes may be easier than lace-ups.
- Trousers or skirts with elastic waistbands.
- Avoid clothes with lots of buttons or fasteners; try a camisole instead of a bra.

Preparation of Food

- Buy ahead to avoid shopping.
- You may want to buy ready meals (that can be heated in a microwave).
- Sandwiches, stews, and soups that require no cutting are easier to manage.
- Electric tin openers are good for one-handed use.

Patient Information

Swelling and Scars

- Swelling in the hand may be a problem after injury as well as surgery.
- Keeping the hand in an elevated (raised) position, such as on pillows when sitting, will improve this.
- If you choose to cool the hand or arm using ice, avoid prolonged periods or direct contact with the skin to prevent cold burns or wetting your dressings.
- While walking, raising the hand in a sling, or tucking the hand inside a jacket, will help prevent fluid pooling in the fingers and hand. Try to avoid letting the affected hand dangle down by your side.
- Scars may be sensitive and tender following surgery. Massaging with a non-perfumed moisturiser such, as E45 or aqueous cream as soon as the wound has healed fully may help lessen this problem.

Pain Control

You may feel pain after surgery. It is important that pain is controlled during rehabilitation to allow movement and to prevent joint stiffness and soft tissue tightness. To allow this we recommend regular use of painkillers and anti-inflammatory drugs, as advised by your doctor.

Physiotherapy

Your consultant will advise you if you need physiotherapy after surgery.

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

Driving: It is your responsibility to make sure you are safe to drive. You can discuss this with your treating clinician if you are still unsure. Please consider bringing someone with you, to avoid having to drive home yourself immediately after any procedure. You may wish to consider waiting until you can grip the steering wheel tightly without any distracting pain, before resuming driving.

Returning to work will depend on your type of job. You should be able to do most everyday activities with any splints or strapping that may have been provided. Please speak to your doctor about this, and do not resume sporting activities until you are told that it is safe to do so.

Patient Information

Further information

For further information please contact:

- The day surgery unit at University Hospital Coventry on 024 7696 6861/024 7696 6868 or at Hospital of St. Cross (Rugby) on 01788 663264
- Plaster room technicians at University Hospital Coventry on 024 7696 6909 or at Hospital of St. Cross (Rugby) on 01788 669143
- Specialist hand surgery nurse/hand-coordinator on 024 7696 5072
- Hand Therapy at University Hospital Coventry & Warwickshire on 024 7696 6016 or at Hospital of St. Cross (Rugby) on 01788 663257

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