

# Flexor tendon *(hand surgery department)*

## **What is a flexor tendon?**

Flexor tendons are smooth, flexible, thick cords that connect the muscles to the bones, they glide inside tunnels as you bend and straighten your fingers and wrist

## **How is it repaired?**

Surgical repair consists of sewing the two ends of the tendon together. However, even after surgery, the repair can still be pulled apart if not protected correctly. Therefore you need to work closely with your hand therapist and follow all advice given.

## **What happens after the repair?**

Your hand will initially be in a plaster and a bulky dressing. You will be given an appointment via a letter in the post or by a phone call to come see a Physiotherapist (PT) and Occupational therapist (OT) within the hand therapy department.

The OT or PT will remove your plaster and dressing and provide you with a lightweight splint. The splint will be worn for six weeks at all times, day and night, and is removed for hygiene and hand exercises only. The splint will keep your hand and fingers bent forward, to protect the tendon repair. Its position is adjusted every two weeks to straighten the wrist gradually.

## **What exercises should I do?**

Your physiotherapist will give you an exercise regime which should be carried out every hour. The exercises aim to restore the normal glide of the tendons and prevent them from becoming stuck down.

Please discuss with your physiotherapist as it may differ from the following depending on your injury and repair.

## Home exercise program

### (i) Passive finger flexion (fingers bent down towards the palm):

this exercise loosens the finger joints in preparation for the next exercise and can be done as often as you like as it does not strain the repaired tendon.



Bend your fingers (on the injured hand) to the palm **by using your opposite hand** to apply the movement, as far as is comfortable (c).



Then allow them to relax back to the starting position (a).



(ii) **Active finger flexion and extension:** this exercise moves the tendons and helps them to glide and not stick down. This should only be performed 10 times an hour.



Your wrist should be kept in a **relaxed neutral position** throughout the exercise (a). Support your arm throughout the exercise by placing it on a table. Actively bend your fingers as far as you can comfortably towards your palm (c). Actively straighten them back up to the starting position (a).

### (iii) Active wrist extension and flexion:



Keeping your fingers **relaxed** in bent forward position, starting at (a), slowly and actively bend your wrist backwards into extension (b) and then forwards into flexion (c), within a comfortable range.

#### **(iv) Passive wrist flexion:**



Bend your wrist forward into flexion as in exercise (iii), but use your other hand to bend it further, as far as it is comfortable. Then actively straighten your wrist.

#### **What shouldn't I do?**

The wrist should not be bent backwards (extended) with the fingers straight until you are advised to do so by your therapist. You must not use your hand for any function for the first six weeks after your operation.

## **When can I return to work / driving / activity?**

At six weeks after the repair you can normally return to driving, and light activities, but please check with your hand therapist. You can normally return to full activities, including heavy lifting and contact sports 12 weeks after the repair.

## **What are the risks or potential problems after a repair?**

- After surgery, swelling is normal and elevation is advised to help reduce this, it can take 6-8 months for swelling to fully reduce. Consult your therapist if you are concerned by any changes to your swelling.
- After any operation there is a risk of infection in the wound. It is important to keep your wound clean and dry until advised by your therapist otherwise. Signs of infection include redness; increased swelling; increased pain or discharge from the wound.
- The repaired tendon can break if too much force is applied through the tendon. If this happens you may feel a “snap” or “pop”, or find that you are unable to bend your finger as well as you could previously. If you have any concerns regarding your repair, please contact the Hand Therapy Unit as soon as possible.
- The tendon can get stuck down in scar tissue and this can prevent the tendon from moving.
- Joints can become stiff following surgery. It is important to attend follow up appointments so that the therapist can monitor you and give you the correct exercises so that you can perform them regularly at home.

## What should I do if I have a problem?

If you have any worries or questions then please contact your hand therapist on telephone: **01924 541900**.

The Hand Therapy Department is open from 8.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday.

After 5.00pm Monday to Friday, on a weekend or Bank Holiday you can contact the Hand Surgery Department (28c) on: 01924 541909

**If you fall on your injured hand, feel a snap or pop in the injured tendon, lose range of movement etc. and think you have ruptured your tendon repair or think you have an infection (as infection can cause your tendon repair to rupture), it is essential that you contact the department.**

We are committed to providing high quality care. If you have a suggestion, comment, complaint or appreciation about the care you have received, or if you need this leaflet in another format please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service on: **01924 542972** or email: [myh-tr.palsmidyorks@nhs.net](mailto:myh-tr.palsmidyorks@nhs.net)

### 1402b

Updated May 2019  
Review Date 2022



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