

Extensor Tendon Repair (thumb), a guide to your therapy

Information and advice for
patients and carers



This leaflet is designed to help you understand your injury, the importance of a splint and the exercises you need to do to make sure your thumb gets better

What is a extensor tendon?

It is a long thin structure which attaches the muscle in your arm to your thumb and allows it to straighten. The tendon in your thumb is called the Extensor Pollicis longus (EPL). You have had surgery to repair this tendon.

When does my therapy (occupational therapy and physiotherapy) start?

You will meet your Therapist 3 to 5 days after your operation, you will be given a splint to wear and some exercises to do.

What is a Splint, and why do I need to wear it?



The splint is used to protect your hand while the tendon is healing and reduces the risk of the repaired tendon(s) snapping. It is usually made of plastic which is shaped to fit your hand. If your splint causes any rubbing, redness or pain contact your therapist immediately.

DO	DON'T
<p>Do wear the splint all the time for 6 weeks. (This will give the tendons time to heal)</p>	<p>Don't remove the splint</p>
<p>Do your exercises that your therapist has taught you</p>	<p>Don't use your hand for any other activities at all (this may damage the tendon repair and you may need another operation)</p>
<p>Do cover the splint with a bag when in the shower or bath</p>	<p>Don't get the splint wet</p>
<p>Do keep away from direct heat sources (this can melt the splint)</p>	<p>Don't drive for 8 to 10 weeks after your operation</p>
<p>Do elevate your hand above your chest (rest it up on pillows when asleep or sitting down)</p>	<p>Don't let your arm dangle at your side</p>
<p>Do move your elbow and shoulder often (or they will get stiff)</p>	<p>Don't play any contact sports for 12 weeks or lift anything heavy (this may damage the tendon)</p>

How often will I have to attend hospital?

Every week for the first 4 weeks at the Leeds General Infirmary on ward L46. After this your therapist will tell you about any more appointments you need and will arrange this for you.

How long will my tendon take to heal?

Your repaired tendon will take 12 weeks until it is fully healed.

When can I return to work?

This will depend on your job and its physical requirements. You can discuss this with your consultant or therapist

What is scar massage and why do I need to do it?

Massage helps the scar to heal better. You will be told by your therapist when you can start and will be taught how to do it - you will need to massage your scar 3 to 4 times daily with a non-perfumed cream.

Home exercise programme



Use your other hand to lift your thumb off the splint until it is straight. Then allow your thumb to return to the splint on its own.

2



Lift your thumb away from the splint without using your other hand

3



Keeping the tip of the thumb in contact with the splint, bend the tip/end of your thumb.

Please complete reps of each exercise, times during the day.

What should I do if I am concerned about my tendon repair?

If you feel a pop or a snap or you stop being able to straighten your thumb you should wear your splint and you must ring the department immediately. If this happens outside of our normal working hours then you should attend Accident and Emergency/minor injuries. If you feel unwell or are worried that your wound is infected then you must also contact Accident and Emergency.

It is important that you do not bend your thumb with force as your tendon is not strong enough to withstand this pressure.



Therapy Department Contact Details

Telephone (0113) 392 2720 Monday-Friday 8am - 3.45pm

The Hand Unit - L46, D floor Clarendon Wing

Leeds General Infirmary

For any problems out of these hours, contact your local Accident & Emergency Department. If you cannot make an appointment, please ring in advance to allow another to be rearranged. Missing appointments can harm your recovery.

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