Patient Education

Hand Center/Bone and Joint Center



This handout explains follow-up care after surgery to repair the flexor tendons in your hand.

If your incisions are red or there is drainage coming from them, call us right away at the phone numbers listed on the next page. Go to the emergency room if this occurs at night or on a weekend.

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON MEDICAL CENTER UW Medicine

After Your Flexor Tendon Repair Surgery

Self-care and follow-up

Wound Care

- Right after your surgery, you will be in a long arm cast that extends from your fingertips to above your elbow. This cast will help control swelling and protect your hand.
- You can begin physical therapy 1 to 2 days after surgery with this cast. You will do a controlled program with a therapist.
- Be sure to keep the incisions clean and dry. Wear a plastic bag over the cast when showering until the sutures have been removed.
- The sutures must be assessed by a hand therapist at least 3 times a week for 3 weeks after surgery.

Pain Management

- You will receive a prescription for narcotic pain medicine. Take this medicine only if you need it.
- Be sure to talk with the clinic nurse about how to take your pain medicine. To best manage your pain, you must take your pain medicine the way it was prescribed. Taking the correct dose at the right time is very important.
- If you have uncomfortable side effects from the pain medicine, call the nurse at 206-598-4263.
- Please see "Medications After Surgery" for more instructions.

Driving

- Do **not** drive if you are taking narcotic pain medicine. It is not safe. The medicine can make you sleepy and delay your reaction time.
- Once you are no longer taking the medicine, you may drive as soon as you can comfortably grip the steering wheel with both hands.

Hand Center/Bone and Joint Center After Your Flexor Tendon Repair Surgery

Questions or Concerns?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help.

Weekdays, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.: Call the Hand Center at **206-598-4263**.

After office hours and on weekends and holidays: Call the hospital operator at **206-598-6190**. Ask for the Hand Fellow on call to be paged. Your call will be returned.

For more information, please visit the Hand Center online at *www.uwhand.com*.



Hand Center Box 354740 4245 Roosevelt Way N.E. Seattle, WA 98105 206-598-4263

Activity

- The most important concern after flexor tendon repair is avoiding using the injured hand for any type of gripping. Gripping can cause a tendon rupture, which would require another surgery. It could also greatly lessen the chances of your hand recovering fully.
- At your first therapy visit, some of your wound dressings may be removed. This will allow you to start your exercise program.
- Do **not** use your hand for **any** activity for up to 6 weeks after surgery. Doing your physical therapy is very important. Therapy may last up to 12 weeks after surgery.
- If you are a student, feel free to bring a letter of disability to the appropriate office at your school or college. This will give the school documentation of your injury and may make you eligible for help with writing and typing, if needed.

Follow-up

- When you leave the surgery center, you should have a follow-up appointment in the Hand Center already set for 10 to 14 days after surgery.
- At least half of your sutures will be removed at your first follow-up visit with the doctor.
- The therapist will remove the other half of the sutures 5 to 7 days after the first half is removed. Your *dressings* (bandages) will also be removed at this visit.
- After the sutures are removed, you will either get another long-arm cast, or the therapist will make a plastic splint. Both will protect your hand, let your tendon heal, and allow you to keep doing your exercise program. This cast or splint is usually worn until 6 weeks after surgery.

Results

Flexor tendon surgery is one of the most difficult injuries to recover from. It takes 10 to 12 weeks for the tendons to regain most of their strength. Do **not** return to full activity or do heavy lifting for 3 months after surgery. Many times, patients need another surgery to remove scar tissue 3 to 4 months after the first surgery.