

Hand therapy

Tuft fracture

Information for patients

What is a tuft fracture?

A tuft fracture is a break of the end of the fingertip bone. These fractures are usually the result of the finger being crushed. A fracture is the same as a break.



What are the signs and symptoms of a tuft fracture?

Symptoms of tuft fractures are:

- pain
- swelling
- decreased range of motion around the joint at the tip of your finger
- numbness or pins and needles at the fingertip. This is the result of an injury to the small nerves at the fingertip

What are the treatments available for a tuft fracture?

In the emergency department:

An x-ray is usually taken to assess the injury. Tuft fractures are not always immobilised because bone fragments are unlikely to change position. A splint may be provided to ease the pain and the swelling.

At your next appointment:

You will have your medical notes and x-ray reviewed in a **virtual fracture clinic** within 5 days of your emergency admission. From this review you will receive further information about your injury and the proposed treatment.

From this virtual review there are three scenarios

- you may be discharged with some advice on self-management. This will include the type and length of protection needed
- you may be referred to hand therapy if you need rehabilitation to help you regain your hand function. You will receive an appointment in the next 14 days

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- you may need a face-to-face assessment if the bone fragments are not aligned or if there are several fragments

Surgical intervention is rarely needed. It is usually done to improve the position of bone fragments.

Learn more about the **virtual fracture clinic** at www.imperial.nhs.uk/our-services/orthopaedics/virtual-fracture-clinic

How long will it take to heal?

Most tuft fractures will be healed enough at around three to four weeks to allow use of your hand in light day-to-day activities.

Strengthening exercises such as squeezing a ball or day to day activities requiring force should not start before eight weeks from the initial injury.

For most patients we are confident that the bone is as strong as an uninjured bone at around 12 weeks from the date of the injury.

When can I return to my day-to-day activities?

- you can decide when to **drive** again. However, you should feel confident you can control your car safely in case of an emergency.
- you can resume **moderate activities** after around eight weeks
- you must wait three months to return to **contact sports** and leisure involving impact on the hand
- your **return to work** depends on the type of work and how flexible your job or employer are. If you need a fit note (Statement of Fitness to Work) this can be provided by the surgeons, hand therapist or your GP

Will I regain full function and when?

Pain should improve on a weekly basis and tend to be regular for around 12 weeks. After this period occasional pain can still happen but it tends to be less often. Occasional pain can be expected for up to six months. Some people experience occasional pain for up to a year, but this is rare and tends to be associated with heavier activities or colder temperature.

Sensation is often the main issue. You may experience temporary numbness, pins and needles and in a minority of patient a sensation of burning pain at your fingertip. This is because our fingertips have many more nerve endings compared to the rest of our body. These tend to take a long time to recover when crushed.

The best way to improve your sensation is to touch different textures and compare the sensation to a non-injured finger, especially if your feel burning sensation during light touch.

At three months after the injury most patient will have regained **near full range of motion** and **strength** and will not experience significant issue in their day-to-day life. Around a quarter of patients may not have a fully straight finger after these injuries. This usually does not affect function but can change the appearance of the finger.

The **shape and size** of the finger may appear different. The swelling will take up to six to 12 months to settle completely.

What can I do to help myself after my emergency visit?

There are several things that you can do to help your recovery:

- painkillers can be useful in the first few days after the injury, but we recommend you stop them when you start to move your hand. It is important that you feel your pain as it will be the best way to guide your return to activities
- you can gently move all joints that are not immobilised if it is comfortable to do so

Contact details

These contact details are not for urgent queries. Please allow 24hrs for a reply Monday-Friday.

Waiting to hear from us after your Emergency visit?

Call us on 020 3312 5552 – general virtual fracture clinic enquiries

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at **imperial.pals@nhs.net** The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department
Fourth floor
Salton House
St Mary's Hospital
Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: **ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net**

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:

imperial.patient.information@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

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