

## Hand trauma

# Nailbed repair surgery

## Information for patients, relatives and carers

### What is a nailbed injury?

A nailbed injury is an injury of the fingertip, which is usually caused by a crushing or cutting accident. The fingernail (nail plate) and the soft tissue (nailbed) under it are injured. The fingertip bone might also be fractured (broken), which is called a tuft fracture.

It is a common injury in adults and children, often caused by fingertips getting trapped in doors.

### Nailbed repair

We need to repair the nailbed so that it can heal faster, reduce the risk of infection and reduce the risk of having a deformed nail. When you also have a fingertip fracture, the nailbed repair procedure is even more important, so that we can carefully wash the broken bone fragments, which reduces the infection risk. The broken bone usually heals on its own after about four weeks.

For adults, we do the procedure under local anaesthetic (numbing injections) in the trauma clinic. For children, we can also do the procedure under a general anaesthetic (asleep) in the operating theatre.

### **Nailbed repair procedure**

During the procedure, we will remove the fingernail (nail plate) to allow us to look at the wound. We will wash and repair it with dissolvable stitches. Then we cover the fingertip with a bulky dressing to protect the area.

Your fingernail takes around three months to grow back. At first, it may look a bit different from the previous nail, but usually it will return to normal about one year after the procedure. If you have any problems with fingernail growth at this point, we can check it in an outpatient clinic and see if you need any further treatment. If we are no longer seeing you in the outpatient clinic, please ask your GP to refer you back to us.

### **How soon will my surgery be?**

You will usually have your nailbed repair surgery within four days after you first come to the hospital.

Nailbed repair surgery is an urgent surgery, which means we can book your surgery in quickly. This also means that the time or day of your surgery might be changed at short notice if there is another urgent requires emergency surgery.

We try to do children's procedures as early as possible in the day.

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## **Will I need a splint?**

Usually after the procedure a bulky dressing will be applied to the affected finger(s), rather than a plaster splint. You'll need to have this on for two weeks, but the dressing will be changed at your follow up appointment five to seven days after surgery.

If you have an unstable broken bone (fracture), you might need a splint for around six weeks to hold the broken ends of the bone in a position for it to heal well. The surgical team will check the fracture during surgery and will tell you if you need a splint.

## **Is there a non-surgical option?**

If you have a broken fingertip bone, there is a risk of developing an infection in the bone, so we would advise you to have the procedure. If you don't have a broken bone, the damage to the nailbed can cause the nail to grow with a bump or ridge, but shouldn't affect function. Usually the injured nail will fall off on its own if we don't treat it, and a new one will grow in its place. If you are interested in non-surgical management, please let us know and we can discuss the options with you before you make a decision.

## **How to prepare for your surgery**

### **Fasting before arriving at the hospital**

If your procedure is going to be done under general anaesthetic (asleep) you will need to fast before your procedure.

Please make sure you:

- do not eat anything after 2 am on the morning of your surgery (only plain water after this time)
- do not drink anything after 6 am on the morning of your surgery, except a small sip of water to take any regular medications
- do not have any chewing gum after 6 am on the morning of your surgery

Fasting before your surgery improves the safety of general anaesthetic, if you do not follow these rules, your procedure is likely to be delayed or moved to another day.

If you take regular medications, our team will advise if any of your regular medications need to be withheld before your surgery. If you're not sure, please ask us.

## **On the day**

### **Arriving at St Mary's Hospital**

If you are coming for your procedure as a day case (you're not staying the night at the hospital), please make sure you arrive on time. Usually, we will ask you to arrive at 7.30am, but sometimes we might ask you to arrive later, if your surgery is in the afternoon.

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As mentioned above, nailbed repair surgery is an urgent surgery, which means we can book your surgery in quickly, but this does mean that if there is another urgent emergency procedure we might have to change the time of your procedure. Therefore we are unable to give exact timings for your procedure. We will try to keep you updated.

Please be patient with our team while you're waiting for surgery. It is a good idea to bring something to do (e.g. a book to read) while you're waiting.

### **Before your operation**

Day surgery:

Adults – We will ring you the day before your surgery. Please follow the instructions we give you in this phone call about where to go. Usually this is either the Surgical Admissions Lounge on level 4 in the QEQM building or Theatres on level 4 in the Paterson building at St Mary's Hospital.

Children – Please go to the children's ward (usually this will be either Great Western Ward or Westway Ward). Normally we will call to confirm where to go the day before surgery. It will be on level 6 in the QEQM building.



West Way and Great Western Wards  
– Level 6 QEQM



Paterson Building



Theatres Admissions Lounge on Level 4 of QEQM



Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (QEQM) Building

## Before your surgery

On the ward, the surgical team will come to see you, explain the procedure and complete a consent form with you for the operation. They will also draw an arrow on you to highlight the injured finger. You will change into a hospital gown, and the nurse will take you to the operating theatre where the procedure will happen when we are ready for you.

Children and adults with cognitive difficulties can take a relative, carer or friend with them to the operating theatre for their anaesthetic, however the accompanying person will not be able to stay for the operation. They will be able to meet them once the operation is finished in the recovery area.

If you are having a regional or general anaesthetic we will give this to you in the anaesthetic room, and then take you into the operating room. The anaesthetic doctor will give you the medications either as an injection or for you to breath in if you're going to sleep. The anaesthetic doctor will explain more about this. If you are having a general anaesthetic, you will wake up after your procedure in the recovery room.

If you are having a local anaesthetic, we will take you directly into the operating room, where you will lie down on the operating bed with your arm placed on a table, then the surgeon will give you the numbing injections (local anaesthetic).

For both approaches, we will ask you to confirm your name, date of birth, and the procedure you are having before giving you the anaesthetic.

## After your surgery

If you have had a general anaesthetic, the surgical team will come to see you on the ward to explain how the procedure went. You will need someone to collect you from the hospital after

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your procedure. This can be a family member, partner, or friend. If no-one can collect you, you will need to stay in hospital overnight.

If you are having a local anaesthetic, the team will explain how the procedure went at the time of having the procedure. You don't need someone to collect you, but you should not drive yourself home and you should avoid taking public transport to get home.

We will give you instructions for your follow-up appointment before you leave. Usually, this will be one week after your procedure in the plastics dressings clinic (PDC), or can be with your GP practice nurse if you prefer. You will also need to complete one week of antibiotic tablets.

## Recovery

### **What follow up will I need?**

We will book you a follow-up appointment to see the nurse in the Plastics Dressings Clinic to check the wound at five to seven days after your procedure. If you prefer, you can see the Practice Nurse at your local GP for this appointment. While you have dressings in place you will need to keep the area clean and dry.

### **How much time off will I need after surgery?**

You can return to school the day after the operation as long as you can keep the dressing clean and dry. We recommend that you don't play sports, instruments or do other practical activities for two weeks while the wound is healing.

Adults can return to work the day following the procedure, and can do activities like writing and typing as long as it's not too painful. You should avoid heavy lifting, manual work and sports for at least two weeks while the wound is healing.

We can give you statement of fitness for work (fit note) for your employer if you need one.

### **When will my hand function return to normal?**

Usually hand function (how your hand works) is not affected by this injury. However, pain, swelling and stiffness might limit hand function. We recommend that you use painkillers and regularly move your hand and use your hand to avoid this. You can start doing more active hobbies like sports and playing instruments after at least two weeks after your procedure.

### **Is there anything I can do to improve the healing and recovery process?**

- keep your hand elevated as much as possible – we can give you a sling to help!
- regular movement of fingers and hand
- use regular painkillers where needed
- rest your finger for two to four weeks
- keep the dressings clean and dry
- once the wound has healed, you should use it normally, and massage the area to stop it from getting sensitive

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- we will give you other specific instructions after the procedure

## Useful contact details

Plastics dressings clinic team: [imperial.smhplasticscns@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.smhplasticscns@nhs.net)

Contact phone number: 07833725706

Hand therapy team: [imperial.handtherapyimperial@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.handtherapyimperial@nhs.net)

These email inboxes and this phone number are monitored Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, and one of our team will reply to you as soon as possible.

For any emergency concerns (for example infection or unmanageable pain): Please go to St Mary's A&E where you will be assessed by the on-call Plastic Surgery team. Or call 111, speak to your GP or local A&E.

## 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 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto: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](mailto: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.communications@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.communications@nhs.net)

## Wi-fi

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