

## Hand function

# Wound closure surgery

## Information for patients, relatives and carers

### Hand wound injuries

You can get a hand wound in different ways, such as from a cut, or getting your hand crushed, for example by getting your hand trapped in a door. You will have a break in the skin, and may have damage to muscle, tendons, nerves, or blood vessels.

### How will you treat my hand injury?

We will do a wound exploration, washout and closure surgery. During this surgery we will check inside your wound to see if anything other than your skin has been damaged. We will also wash your wound thoroughly. If another structure has been damaged, such as a tendon, we will try to repair it.

We might need to make the wound bigger (extend it) to allow us to check your wound fully. We will usually do this by making a cut in a zigzag pattern. This will prevent a fixed bend of the finger or hand (contracture) when your wound heals.

### How soon will my surgery be?

We will usually be able to do your surgery within four days after we first see you at the hospital. However, it is safe to do your surgery within two weeks.

Wound exploration, washout and closure 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 an emergency surgery that needs to happen first.

### Will I need to be asleep for the surgery?

Whether you need to be asleep or not depends on where your injury is and what kind of injury it is. If you don't need to be asleep for the procedure, we will use local anaesthetic (numbing injections) to numb the area so you don't feel pain during the surgery.

You might be:

- awake with an injection to numb the area (local anaesthetic)
- awake with an injection in your armpit or around your collar bone to numb your whole arm (regional anaesthetic)
- asleep (general anaesthetic)

As a team we (surgeons and anaesthetic doctors) will discuss with you which type of anaesthetics are suitable. This is based on several factors including the duration of your operation, your general health, whether you have someone to take you home and look after you on the day of surgery, and your preferences. We will make a decision together with you about which type of anaesthetic you will have.

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## How to prepare for your surgery

### **Fasting before arriving at St Mary's Hospital**

If your procedure is going to be done while you're awake (under local anaesthetic), you don't need to fast before your surgery.

If your procedure is going to be done under general or regional anaesthetic (while you're asleep or your whole arm is numb) 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 for a small sip of water to take any usual tablets
- 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 tell you if you need to stop any of them before your surgery. If you're not sure, please ask us.

## On the day

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

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

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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The surgical team who will be performing the procedure will come to see you and confirm the procedure and your consent for the procedure. We will explain why the operation is important, the risks of the surgery, alternatives to surgery including no surgery, and answer any questions you have about the operation. We will also draw an arrow on you to mark the area of injury.

As mentioned above, wound exploration, washout and closure surgery is an urgent surgery, which means we can book your surgery in quickly, but this does mean that if there is another urgent procedure we might have to change the time of your procedure.

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

### **Before your surgery**

On the ward, 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 however be able to meet you 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 the procedure. This can be a family member, partner, or friend. You will need someone to stay with you for the first night after the operation. This is in case there are any problems that mean you need to come back to the hospital, such as bleeding or pain that is not controlled with painkillers. If you do not have someone to collect you after the operation or stay with you overnight, you will need to stay in hospital overnight.

If you are having a local anaesthetic, the team will explain this while you are in the operating theatre, and you don't need someone to collect you or stay with you for the first night after the operation, however you cannot drive yourself home we advise not to take public transport home.

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

## Recovery

### **Will I need a splint after my surgery?**

If we only wash and close your wound, you won't need a splint.

If we find damage to other structures than just your skin, for example damaged tendons, you may need a splint. We will tell you if we find injuries to other structures in your hand and whether you will need a splint.

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

Wounds usually take two to four weeks to heal. However, the scar on your hand will carry on healing and improving for 18 to 24 months.

When you've injured your hand, you might use it less, which might lead to some stiffness in your hand. You might need hand therapy (hand physiotherapy) to help get your hand function back after injury and surgery, depending on how severe the injury is. The first three weeks are particularly important for your hand function to return. There is a chance that your hand might not completely return to how it was before and you might have some long-term stiffness.

### **What follow up will I need after my surgery?**

Your first follow up appointment will be about one week after your surgery. Depending on your injury, you might need to see your GP practice nurse, the plastics dressing clinic team and/or the hand therapy team. We will explain your follow up plan to you after your surgery.

If your stitches are non-dissolvable, you will need your stitches removed after 10 to 14 days. This can be done by the nurses at the plastics dressing clinic or by a nurse at your GP surgery. If your stitches are dissolvable, they will usually fall out by 10 to 14 days.

### **How much time will I need to rest from work/school after my surgery?**

This depends on what your job is and if you can make adjustments to it while you're recovering. You will need to keep the wound clean and dry for one week and will be given individual instructions after your operation.

School – you can go back to school the next day with a protective bulky dressing. You'll need to talk to your school because you will need to rest from sports, instruments and other practical activities for at least two weeks.

Manual work – you can return to work with light duties the following day, but you can't do any heavy manual labour using the injured hand until the wound has healed (at least two weeks).

Desk based work – you can return to work the following day. You will need adjustments for at least two weeks, to protect the injured area, but may be able to do light tasks such as typing, but you should not do any manual tasks such as lifting heavy objects using the injured hand.

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

### **When can I return to normal activities/hobbies?**

Once the wound has healed (after about 2 weeks), it will be safe for you to return to normal activities and hobbies. This will be guided by you, your pain and your symptoms. Please note this applies to driving.

We advise that you don't drive while your injury is healing. This is because you might not be able to safely control your vehicle without making your injury worse, for example during an emergency stop. However, you should speak to the DVLA and your insurance company for more advice about this.

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

- use your hand as guided by the surgical team and hand therapists.
- keep your hand elevated (raised up) to reduce swelling – we will give you a sling for this•
- follow the hand therapist's instructions on how to move your hand to prevent stiffness and use painkillers if you need them.
- do not smoke or vape – nicotine makes it harder for your body to heal!
- once the wound has healed regular gentle massage and moisturising of the scar will improve function and scar appearance, and reduce the risk of sensitivity.

## **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.

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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

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: [www.imperial.nhs.uk](http://www.imperial.nhs.uk)

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