



Caring for your hand after surgery

i Important advice for patients following hand surgery

About this booklet

The purpose of this booklet is to provide general advice about caring for your hand after surgery.

Immediately after surgery

Showering and bathing

Keep your dressing clean and dry. You may need to use a plastic bag or rubber glove in the shower or bath.

Dressings

You may have been advised that you can take off the large bandage two days after your operation. You will have been supplied with some spare sticky dressings, but do not change this dressing unless you have to. If the dressing comes off by itself, try not to touch the wound, but do make sure that the skin is dry before replacing the dressing.

If you have a finger bandage, leave this in place until your stitches are removed.

Swelling

It is important to avoid too much swelling in the hand:

- Keep your hand elevated as much as possible for the first few days after surgery.
- Keep your shoulder and elbow joints moving regularly on the operated side.
- Keep gently moving your fingers to make a fist.

Stitches

Most patients will have removable stitches. You should make an appointment to see your practice nurse about 10-14 days after your operation to have these removed.

Some patients will have dissolving stitches. Knots on the outside of the skin usually fall off after about two weeks.

Complications

Immediately contact the Surgical Day Unit on 0141 951 5301 if you experience:

- any further swelling,
- increasing pain,
- numbness, or
- change in the colour of your fingers.
- Pus discharging from the wound

The Surgical Day Unit is open Monday to Friday from 9am to 6pm. Out with these hours, call 0141 951 5000 and ask to speak to the Senior Nurse.

Caring for your scar

You can start your wound care after your stitches have been removed and the scabs have gone from the wound.

What is a scar?

A scar is a mixture of blood vessels, cells and fibrous tissue where there was once a wound in the skin. People scar differently. Scars are as unique as the individual.

How long do scars take to mature?

Your scar will go through a process of changing colour, depth, texture and shape over a period of 12 to 18 months.

How do I care for my scar?

It is important to care for your scar in the early stages after healing. Scars often no longer have the ability to produce their own oil and sweat, like the rest of the skin. After your stitches have been removed, it is important to moisturise and massage your scar regularly with an un-perfumed cream.

How should I massage my scar after hand surgery?

This will help to flatten and soften the scar. It also helps with sensitivity in the scar.

Using an un-perfumed cream, perform deep and firm circular movements across the scar line and the area immediately around it. This ensures that the scar does not stick to the underlying surface which then helps the structures under the skin to move freely.

If you have any questions about caring for your scar, please speak to your Surgeon.

How often should I massage my scar?

You should massage your scar at least twice a day, for a minimum of two minutes, for three months after your stitches are removed.

What are the benefits of massaging my scar?

Massaging the scar stimulates the area around it, helping to reduce redness and swelling and speeding up the maturation and flattening of the scar. Scars with altered sensation will significantly improve with regular massage. If your scar is tender, it is very important to touch it.

General activity do's and don'ts

Work

The amount of time that you will need off work will vary depending on the types of operation and your type of employment. Please discuss this with your surgeon. Most people should not return to work until the stitches have been removed. If you have a heavy or manual job then you may need to take a few weeks off.

Heavy lifting

You should not do any heavy lifting for the first two weeks after surgery. You may be asked to avoid heavy lifting for longer after certain operations

Driving

Driving is not recommended immediately after hand surgery until your stitches are removed. You should be certain that you can drive comfortably and safely using both hands. If you chose to drive with your stitches in then you should check with your insurance company before driving. You should not drive with a plaster cast (stookie) on your hand.

At home

Your ability to complete basic tasks will be reduced when you first go home. If you usually rely on your operated hand, your ability to prepare meals will be affected. You can do much to minimise any inconvenience by preparing before you come into hospital, for example:

- stock up on easy to prepare meals,
- make alternative arrangements for shopping, and
- make alternative arrangements for domestic tasks.

If you have any concerns about how you will manage at home, please let us know. Our Occupational Therapist may be able to offer some practical advice.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns, please email handsurgery@gjnh.scot.nhs.uk or contact the orthopaedic clinic during office hours on 0141 951 5553. For out of hours, you should contact the Senior Nurse via the switchboard on 0141 951 5000.

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