

# POST-OPERATIVE INSTRUCTIONS FOR HAND SURGERY PATIENTS

## Elevation

Your hand should be elevated in such a way that the wrist is above elbow level, i.e. there is a downward slope from the hand towards the elbow to allow gravity to help reduce any swelling. It is usually easy to keep the hand elevated, but some people need a sling to help them during the day; it is essential to rest them sloping on pillows or on your chest when in bed. In the first week the wound is usually slightly bruised and a little swollen. Please remember not to keep the hand hanging down or sit with your hand held down in your lap.

## Dressings

Your hand has been bandaged with a “wool and crepe” layered bandage. This bulky dressing minimises swelling and makes you feel more comfortable. The wound is protected and the hand gently immobilised. The bandage should remain intact and dry for 48 hours. After this time you may remove the bulky dressings and apply a fresh self-adhesive dressing over the operated area if needed.

If your hand has been immobilised with a plaster cast following surgery, please keep it intact and dry until you are reviewed either by a doctor or a physiotherapist in the clinic.

## Stitches

In many cases it is possible to use dissolving stitches, but sometimes stitches are used that need to be removed. In either case, unless instructed otherwise, please arrange for the nurse at your GP practice or outpatient clinic to look at the wound around 10-14 days after surgery and remove sutures if necessary.

Although the wound heals within the first two weeks after surgery, the scar continues to mature for up to 6-8 months. In the first 6 weeks it is often pink/red, firm and tender. This is normal, and regular massage of the scar with a simple moisturising cream as soon as the wound has healed will speed up the scar maturation and your recovery.

## Painkillers

You might experience mild pain/discomfort once the local anaesthetic has worn off (most commonly 4-6 hours after the operation). You should take the painkillers as prescribed before the local anaesthetic has fully worn off, as they will be most effective this way.

## Exercises

Remember to continue light duties and move your fingers, elbow and shoulder joints in order to prevent stiffness. Even while in the hand bandage, try the following finger exercises as soon as possible:

- straightening the fingers completely
- making a claw and a fist with the fingers
- spreading the fingers as wide as possible
- touch each of your fingertips with the tip of your thumb

## Returning to work

Timing of your return to work is variable according to your occupation and the type of surgery.

You should not drive whilst your hand is bandaged and splinted.

**If you have any problems when you are discharged following your operation please contact the Hospital ward.**