

# Information after hand surgery

## Hand Unit

## Plastic Surgery Department

### Patient information sheet

This information sheet applies to patients who have undergone surgery on their hand or forearm - *the arm below the elbow* -. It explains how to look after your hand or forearm after your operation until you come back for a follow up appointment in the hand unit. These are general guidelines and therefore can change depending on your individual circumstances and surgery.

### Contact details

Before you leave the hospital after your operation please make sure we have your correct telephone numbers, address and GP details.

### Dressings

Do not take your dressing off before your first appointment - *see Follow up appointments section below* -. Do not get your dressing wet or dirty as it increases the risk of you developing an infection. To keep the dressing dry while washing or showering you can put your hand in a large plastic bag without any holes. Put tape around the open end to stop water getting in.

### Splints or plaster

If you have a splint, anything hard which is stopping you from moving a part of your hand or forearm **do not** take it off before you come for your follow up appointments - *see appointment section below* -. The splint is there to protect the surgery that you have had done and by removing it you could rupture - *break* - the repair.

### Elevation

You should keep your hand elevated in a sling for two to three days after your operation. Elevated means that it should be above the level of your heart. When sitting or sleeping you should try and

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keep your hand elevated above your heart on a couple of pillows. Hand elevation is important to prevent swelling and stiffness of the fingers. Remember not to walk with your hand hanging down by your side, or to sit with your hand held in your lap.

## Painkillers - *analgesia* -

If your surgeon thinks that you need painkillers we will give them to you before you leave the day surgery unit. We will also give you instructions on when to take them.

## Antibiotics

Antibiotics are not routinely prescribed after surgery. If your surgeon thinks that you need antibiotics then we will give them to you before you are discharged. We will also give you instructions on when to take them.

## Bleeding

If you experience bleeding after you have left hospital, apply firm pressure over the wound for 15 minutes. If this does not stop the bleeding then contact St George's using the contact numbers at the bottom of this leaflet.

## Infection

After the operation you should look out for any signs of infection. These include:

- redness
- swelling
- increased pain
- discharge - *fluid leaking through the dressing* -
- raised temperature.

If you experience these symptoms then please contact St George's using the contact numbers at the bottom of this leaflet.

## Smoking

You should not smoke after surgery as it increases the risk of the surgery failing and increases the risk of you developing an infection. If you need help to stop smoking then contact your GP surgery or go to <http://smokefree.nhs.uk/> or call NHS Direct - *see contact details below* -.

## Sick notes

You can self certificate off work for one week. The plastic surgeons, or your GP can arrange a sick note if you require one for a longer period for your employer.

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## Follow up appointments

The follow up appointments you need depend on the surgery you have had. The nurse discharging you will tell you if you need to come back to St George's or to your GP.

Your first wound check is usually one week after your surgery. If you need to be seen by the hand unit nurses then we will send this appointment to you in the post. If you are being followed up at your GP surgery then you will need to contact them to make this appointment. You will get further wound care advice at this appointment. If you have stitches which need removing, then these will need to be removed 10 to 14 days after your surgery. We will tell you whether this will be done at your GP or in the hand unit.

If you need to be seen by the hand therapists then this is often 3 to 5 days after your surgery. One of the hand unit administrators will phone you to make this appointment and they will also book you an appointment to see the hand unit nurses for a dressing change at the same time. If your contact details change then you must let the hospital know so that your records can be updated.

## Returning to normal activities

Length of time off work varies and depends on:

- your injury,
- the type of surgery which you have had,
- the work that you do.

Your surgeon will give you more information. When you come for your follow up appointment the hand unit nursing staff and the hand therapists can also advise you.

## Driving

This is an issue between yourself, your insurance company and the DVLA. Generally you must be able to show that you are in complete control of a vehicle. With very bulky dressings and/or a splint this would be very difficult to prove and you should not drive.

## Emergency contact numbers for patients who have their surgery via the day surgery unit:-

On the day of your surgery:

- until 19.00 hours call the day surgery unit on 020 8725 0420
- after 19.00 hours until 08.00 hours the following morning call the day surgery on-call nurse on 07956 571308
- after 08.00 hours the day after your surgery then please follow the instructions in the 'Any questions' section below

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## Emergency contact numbers for patients who have their surgery via Keate ward:-

If your operation is on a weekend and you have a problem before 09.00 hours on the Monday after your surgery:-

Keate ward 020 8725 3226/3227

If it is after 09.00 hours the Monday after your surgery then please follow the instructions below.

### Any questions?

If you have any questions or worries about your wound or dressing please contact:

Hand Unit 020 8725 4770  
Monday to Friday 08.30 to 17.00 hours

If you have any questions or concerns about your splint or exercise programme please contact:

Hand Therapists 020 8725 1038  
Monday to Friday 08.00 to 17.00 hours

If it is after 17.00 hours, at the Weekend or Bank Holiday contact the on-call surgeon for advice on 020 8672 1255 and ask for bleep 7050. If you are unable to contact the on-call plastic surgeon then please go to A&E - *accident and emergency* - at St George's Hospital. It is likely that if you attend another A&E department they will refer you back to St George's Hospital because you are already under the care of the plastic surgeons.

### Further information

You may also find it useful to contact NHS 111 on

Telephone 111

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