

# After Hand Surgery

This leaflet applies to patients who have undergone surgery on their hand or forearm. It explains how to look after your hand after your operation until you come back for a follow up appointment. These are general guidelines and therefore can change depending on your individual circumstances. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

## Contact details

Before you leave the hospital, please ensure we have your correct telephone number, address and GP details.

## Dressings

Do not remove your dressings before your first appointment unless your surgeon specifically asks you to do so. Do not allow your dressings to get wet or dirty, as this increases the risk of you developing an infection. To keep the dressing dry whilst washing or showering, you can put your hand in a large plastic bag (without any holes) and tape the open end. If your dressing accidentally gets wet, phone the Hand Unit as soon as possible.

## Splint or plaster cast

If you have a splint or plaster cast on your finger/hand, it is vital that you **do not** take this off before you come for your follow up appointment. The splint/plaster is there to protect the surgery that you have had and by removing it you could rupture the surgical repair.

## Elevation

You should keep your hand elevated in a sling for two to three days after your operation. Your hand should be kept above the level of your heart. When sitting or lying down you should try to keep your arm elevated on pillows. Remember not to walk with your hand hanging down by your side or to sit with your hand in your lap.

## Painkillers

If your surgeon thinks that you will need painkillers, these will be prescribed for you. The nurses will explain how to take them. If you have not been given painkillers but you feel you would like some, you can ask the pharmacist at your local chemist for advice on simple painkillers which you can buy over the counter.

## Antibiotics

Antibiotics are not routinely prescribed after hand surgery. If your surgeon thinks that you need antibiotics then they will be given to you before you are discharged. The nurses will explain how to take them before you leave.

## Bleeding

If you notice bleeding after you leave the hospital, apply firm pressure over the wound and elevate your hand for 15 minutes. If this does not stop the bleeding then contact us for further advice.

## Infection

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

- Redness
- Swelling
- Increased pain
- Hot or burning sensation
- Pus
- Raised temperature/fever.

If you notice any of the above symptoms, please contact the hand team using the details below.

## Smoking

You should not smoke after hand surgery as it increases the risk of the surgery failing and increases the risk of infection. If you need help to stop smoking then contact your GP surgery or go to <https://www.nhs.uk/smokefree>

## Sick note

You can self-certificate absence from work for one week. The surgeon can arrange a sick note for you if you require one for a longer period. Please ask for one before you leave the hospital.

The length of time off work depends on your surgery and the type of work you do. Your surgeon, nurse or therapist can advise you.

## Follow up appointments

Follow up appointments depend on the type of surgery you have had. You will be told if you need to come back to the Hand Unit or if you can arrange an appointment with your practice nurse at your local GP surgery.

Follow up appointments in the Hand Unit will be arranged with you via the telephone within one week of your surgery. **If you have not heard from the Hand Unit after seven days, please contact us using the numbers below.**

Your first appointment in the Hand Unit will be with one of the nurses. If you need to be seen by the hand therapy team you will be given a combined appointment.

After your first appointment, your nurse or hand therapist will advise you on further appointments.

## Driving

This is an issue between you, your insurance company and the DVLA. Generally you must be able to show that you are in complete control of a vehicle. With a bulky dressing and/or a splint this would be very difficult to prove. Following certain types of surgery we recommend you do not drive. Your surgeon, nurse or therapist can give you further advice.

## Contact us

**If you have any questions or concerns about your hand, please contact the Hand Unit on 020 8725 4770 (Monday to Friday, 08:.30am to 5pm). Out of hours for urgent advice or emergencies only, please contact the on-call team on 020 8672 1255 and ask for bleep 7050.**

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)

## Additional services

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

**Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

**Tel:** 111



**Reference:** PLS\_AHS\_01 **Published:** January 2018 **Review date:** January 2020