

Metacarpal phalangeal (MCP) joint replacement programme

Advice for patients at four weeks post-surgery

This leaflet offers information about your MCP joint replacement surgery and the rehabilitation process following the operation. It is very important that you follow the advice of your surgeon and hand therapist to ensure that you do not damage your joints and that you achieve a good range of movement. If you have any question or concerns, please speak to a member of the team involved in your care.

The hand therapy process

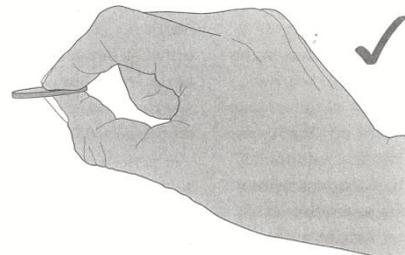
A new joint takes around 12 weeks to fully heal. Within this time, you must try to achieve the maximum amount of movement possible, especially in bending. Your hand therapist will monitor your treatment and adapt your rehabilitation programme according to your needs.

It has now been four weeks since your joint replacement surgery. At four weeks, you can now start to use your hand for light activities out of your splints. You will now only need to wear a splint at night and for protection when you are out and about during the day.

You will need to start to learn to use your fingers in a correct precision grip. Where possible, you need to make sure that you start to use a tip to tip pinch between fingers, not a lateral (or key) pinch grip. (See figure A)

This is so that you do not stress your joint replacements into a position of deformity and potentially put them at risk of damage.

Pure Pinch



Lateral Pinch

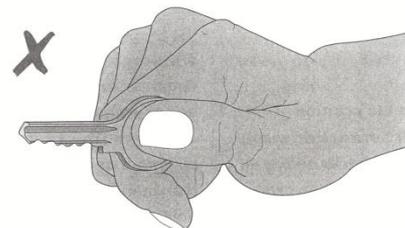


Figure A

Will I need to do any specific exercises?

You will need to complete regular hand therapy exercises to ensure that your joints don't get stiff and to improve the range of movement in your fingers. Your therapist will provide you with exercises on a separate handout.

How can I look after my joint replacements?

We encourage you to adopt five 'joint protection principles' which are listed below. This means taking the time to look at how you do a task and adapting the way that you do it to ensure you look after your joints. It is important to think about these principles in order to look after your hands, both following your operation and into the future.

1. **Be guided by pain**

The way that you use your joints can cause increased pain. If you continue to push yourself over a long period of time, this can increase your pain and can create deformities at your joints. Allow yourself to be guided by pain – if it hurts, stop.

Wear splints as recommended by your hand therapist and make sure that you have regular breaks. If you still experience pain for up to an hour after an activity, reduce the number of exercise repetitions and let your therapist know.

2. **Distribute weight over as many joints as possible**

Adapt the way that you carry out activities (such as carrying objects) to ensure that the weight is distributed equally over many joints. Use both hands where appropriate and keep as much of your hands in contact with the item as possible. For example, hold a cup with both hands, rather than with the finger and thumb only.

3. **Use larger, stronger joints**

The small joints of your hands can be strained easily, so you should use larger joints when you can. For example, carry a bag over your shoulder or forearm rather than in your hand.

4. **Avoid positions of deformity**

Put simply, this is being aware of activities that can stress your joints into an un-natural direction i.e.: a position of deformity. You should avoid activities such as:

- Pushing down on your knuckles
- Lifting objects with your wrist bent forward
- Activities which involve twisting or over stretching the fingers
- Activities which push the fingers towards the little finger side of the hand e.g.: picking up a mug using one or two fingers only.

5. **Avoid gripping objects tightly**

Maintaining a tight grip during activities such as writing or knitting puts a lot of strain on your joints. This can lead to pain and stiffness in the surrounding muscles, especially if carried out over a long period of time.

Try not to wait for pain to start before stopping or changing an activity; change activities regularly so that different groups of joints are used. In addition, try to take frequent breaks and reduce the length of time you spend carrying out an activity.

Other general information

You can now start to use your hand for light activities, taking notice of how you pick up and grip objects. Gradually increase the amount of activity you are doing on the advice of your therapist.

Examples of light activities include:

- Handling money
- Handling zips/buttons/clothes
- Self-care activities such as showering and brushing your teeth
- Writing or typing for short periods
- Reading a newspaper.

Please continue to wear your splint at night and for protection during the day. Continue to massage your scar(s) as previously directly.

Do not use your hand for heavy activities such as lifting a heavy saucepan or kettle of water. You cannot drive for a further four weeks.

Useful sources of information

The following organisations provide further information about MCP joint replacement surgery, rehabilitation and arthritis in general.

Arthritis Research UK

Provides information to people with all forms of arthritis and for their carers.

Web: www.arthritisresearchuk.org

National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society

Offers information about treatment, exercise and lifestyle, as well as support for people newly diagnosed with or seeking further advice about rheumatoid arthritis.

Tel: 0800 298 7650 **Web:** www.nras.org.uk

Arthritis Care

A user-led charity which supports people with arthritis.

Web: www.arthritiscare.org.uk

Contact us

If you have any questions about your recovery after joint replacement surgery, please contact the hand therapy team on 020 8725 1038 (answer phone only, please leave a message and someone will get back to you as soon as possible).

For appointment enquiries, please contact 020 8725 0007 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)

Your therapist's name is _____

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit 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

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

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: THE_MCPJ4_02 **Published:** April 2018 **Review date:** April 2020