

# Accessory Digits: Outpatient Removal

**This leaflet provides information for parents whose child has been born with accessory (extra) finger/s on one or both hands. The medical term for this is polydactyly. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for your baby.**

## What is polydactyly?

Polydactyly is a common congenital abnormality that results in extra fingers on the hand/s. Polydactyly can also affect the feet resulting in extra toes.

## What causes polydactyly?

Polydactyly occurs as the fingers form during embryo development. They fail to divide properly instead forming extra divisions that go on to form partial or whole extra digits.

Usually it is inherited, so if a parent was born with an extra digit then there is a 50 per cent chance of it happening to their child. At other times, it happens spontaneously, without anyone else in the family being previously affected.

## Are there different types of polydactyly?

The extra fingers/toes are typically on the side of the little finger or toe but can be elsewhere on the hand/foot. They can be fully formed with or without a nail and may contain a bone but no joint. They may just be a nubbin of soft tissue and are often only attached to the finger or hand by a small bridge of skin.

## **What are the treatment options?**

For more complex or developed extra fingers, you will be referred to the Paediatric Congenital Hand Consultant.

Due to the extra digit being small and floppy it can twist or get caught in clothing and parents are often concerned that it may get torn off.

The reason for the removal of these types of accessory digits is to prevent injury to the hand or extra digit, to allow normal mobility to the rest of the hand and to improve the aesthetic appearance of the hand. These types of accessory digits can easily be removed in an outpatient clinic setting.

## **When will the procedure/operation being carried out?**

The procedure will be carried out at the same time as your baby's outpatient appointment. You will see the doctor or specialist nurse, who will explain the procedure to you and get your permission to carry out the procedure. Your baby will then be taken to the treatment room, while you wait in the consulting room and get prepared to feed your baby once the procedure is completed.

Your baby's hand or foot is stabilised and, using a sterile technique, a clip is placed at the base of the extra digit. The digit is then removed and with the clip still in place the area is dressed with small tapes.

As soon as the procedure is completed, your baby is comforted and brought straight back to you. Babies often find comfort from being given a feed after the procedure.

## **Asking for your consent**

It is important that you feel involved in decisions about your baby's care. Once everything is explained to you, you will be asked for verbal consent for this procedure to be carried out.

## **What are the risks?**

All procedures carry a risk but the risks for this are very small. Potential complications include:

- Infection – this is extremely rare but if it occurs a course of antibiotics may be required.
- Bleeding – direct pressure to the area usually resolves this.
- A small nubbin or lump can remain at the location where the digit was – if this is an issue for your baby/child as they grow, your GP can refer you to have it revised.
- A sensitive scar – this can occur with any scar. It is usually observed a few months after removal, typically when the area is tapped or knocked. This is a rare association with a nerve but normally settles down with regular massage and stimulation of the area.

## **Will my baby feel any pain?**

The pain your baby will feel is like that of having a heel prick blood test. There is a brief stinging sensation when the clip is applied to the digit, but they soon settle with a cuddle and a feed.

To help maintain your baby's comfort, they will be given an oral sucrose solution prior to the procedure as it has been shown that this can reduce distress associated with painful procedure in babies less than three months old.

## **What happens after the procedure?**

Your baby will be observed for approximately 10 minutes to ensure s/he settles and there is no bleeding from the site.

## **What do I need to do after I go home?**

Keep the area dry for the next three/four days but after this time you may bathe your baby and get the area wet. The tapes should stay in

place during this time but please don't worry if they fall off, just cover the wound and clip with a simple plaster. If the tape/plaster is still in place after a week, it is advisable to remove them. The small clip will fall off unaided when it is ready.

There will be a small scar which might look red and raised in the beginning but over the next few months the scar will mature, flatten and fade. You can massage a non-perfumed moisturiser, E45 cream for example, into the scar twice a day to help the scar fade.

It is extremely uncommon to get an infection following this type of procedure but if you notice any redness around the wound, the wound appears hotter than the normal skin or if there is any fluid leaking from the wound, it could indicate an early wound infection and you should get your baby and the wound reviewed by either your GP or contact the plastic surgery department.

### **Will my baby have a follow-up appointment?**

When the nurse has checked the wounds, your baby will be allowed home. No other follow up is required.

### **Useful sources of information**

The British Society for Surgery of the Hand [www.bssh.ac.uk](http://www.bssh.ac.uk)

Algopedol® Sucrose 24% oral solution

<https://www.inspiration-healthcare.com/downloads/instructions-for-use--158.pdf>

### **Contact us**

If you have any questions or concerns about the removal of baby's accessory digit/s, please contact the Plastic Surgery Department on 020 8725 1134 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

Out of hours, please contact the on-call plastic surgery SHO via the hospital switchboard on 020 8672 1255.

You can also contact the paediatric plastic surgery clinical nurse specialist on 020 8725 2656 and leave a message on the answerphone. If your query or concern is urgent please don't leave a message but contact the on-call plastic surgery SHO via the hospital switchboard as above on 020 8672 1255.

**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 advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:

Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm

Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.

The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

**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

## **AccessAble**

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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