

Syndactyly

This leaflet provides information about Syndactyly. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your care.

What is Syndactyly and why does it happen?

Syndactyly is a common congenital abnormality of the hand. It is sometimes referred to as 'webbed fingers' and it occurs when two or more of the fingers are connected together by skin or tissue. Sometimes the bones of the fingers may also be fused. Syndactyly can also affect the feet.

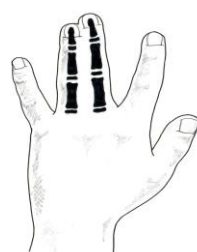
Syndactyly occurs during the development of the baby in the womb. At approximately seven weeks of development the hand 'bud' divides to form the individual fingers. In most cases the fingers fail to separate due to a genetic cause but it can also be due to a disruption of the development of the healthy embryo due to exposure to toxins. Sometimes the cause of the syndactyly is unknown.

Are there different types of Syndactyly?

There are four classifications of syndactyly



Simple,
incomplete



Simple,
complete



Complex



Complicated

- Simple, Incomplete – does not extend to the fingertips
- Simple, Complete – extends to the fingertips
- Complex – fingers joined by bone / cartilage as well as skin
- Complicated – the bones are joined and may appear abnormal. There may also be abnormal tendons, muscles and blood vessels.

What treatments are available?

Syndactyly is usually treated with an operation. Depending on the severity of the syndactyly, the doctor may be able to separate the skin and then apply a dressing or they may need to use a skin graft if there is not enough skin once the fingers are divided. A skin graft is when a small patch of skin is taken from one area of the body, usually the groin and moved to cover the deficit between the fingers.

What happens if my child does not get treatment?

In some cases, surgery may not be recommended, especially if the syndactyly is involving the toes only. This will be discussed with you by your doctor.

Asking for your consent

It is important that you feel involved in decisions about your child's care. Before the operation, you will be asked to sign a consent form to say that you agree to have the treatment and understand what it involves. You can withdraw your consent at any time, even if you have said 'yes' previously. If you would like more details about our consent process, please ask for a copy of our policy.

When will the operation be carried out?

Surgery is usually carried out when your child is between nine and 18 months of age. This operation is carried out under general anaesthetic usually as a day case. You will have an opportunity to discuss the anaesthetic with the anaesthetist on the morning of the operation.

Once the ward nurses are happy your child has recovered from the anaesthetic and they have met the discharge criteria, they will be allowed to go home. Prior to going home, you will be given further written information about caring for the wounds and dressings and about pain relief.

Usually, the dressing will remain in place for approximately two to three weeks. You will be given an appointment to be seen in the Congenital Limb Clinic in the Dragon Centre where the dressing will be removed and the wounds checked. At this stage your child may have another dressing applied or be left without a dressing, depending upon on how the wounds have healed.

Useful sources of information

The British Society for Surgery of the Hand

<https://www.bssh.ac.uk/>

REACH, the support group for children with congenital arm and hand problems.

Visit their website <http://www.reach.org.uk/> or telephone 0845 130 6225.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about syndactyly, please contact the plastic surgery department on 020 8725 1134 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

You can also contact the paediatric plastic surgery clinical nurse specialist on 020 8725 2656 and leave a message on the answerphone. For follow up appointments please contact the plastic surgery appointment desk on 020 8725 5855

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 wings (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

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (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.



Reference: PLS_SYN_LP_04 **Published:** December 2023 **Review date:** December 2025