

Rehabilitation after a Thumb Extensor Tendon Repair

Information for patients four weeks after surgery

This leaflet explains about returning to your everyday activities four weeks after your thumb extensor pollicis longus (EPL) tendon repair. If you have any further questions, please speak to a doctor, nurse or therapist caring for you.

How is my tendon healing?

It is now four weeks after your tendon repair. Your tendon is now strong enough for controlled, light use, but can still be damaged if over-used.

When should I wear my splint?

A thermoplastic splint was made for you to help keep your thumb in a safe position after surgery. Now you should wear the splint only at night and for protection (e.g. on public transport and in busy places like shops) for another two weeks.

How should I look after my scar?

It is important to continue to massage the scar to prevent it from sticking to underlying structures and from making movement difficult.

Massage the scar using a water-based cream (e.g. E45, Nivea or Diprobase) in a deep, circular motion for at least 30 minutes a day. Your therapist may suggest more time than this. You can break this down into smaller chunks of time throughout the day if you need to, e.g. 10 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes at lunchtime and 10 minutes before bed.

Will I be in pain?

Any pain after your operation should settle down over the first few months. Massaging your scar can be painful at times but please carry on as it will really help you to get the best result.

How should I be using my hand day-to-day?

You should now begin to use your hand for light, clean activities. If you are lifting objects, they should weigh no more than one kilogram (two pounds).

Try to use your hand as normally as possible in day-to-day activities such as typing, writing, eating a meal or dressing (including zips, buttons and shoelaces). Make sure you are using all the fingers and not avoiding or favouring one finger.

LIGHT ACTIVITIES <1 Kg	MEDIUM ACTIVITIES 2-3 Kg	HEAVY ACTIVITIES >5 Kg
Personal	Domestic	Domestic
Washing, shaving	Washing up, wiping up	Using a knife
Fastening zips, buttons	Using keys	Lifting a saucepan, kettle
Putting on light clothes	Hanging washing out	Cooking
Using fork, spoon	Sweeping up	Ironing/Vacuuuming
Combing hair	Using spray bottle	Lifting boxes, carrying shopping
Putting on socks, tights	Light meal prep	Making a bed
Tying shoelaces	Washing, blow drying hair	Using a tin opener
Holding a plastic glass		Opening a new jar/bottle top / hot water bottle
Doing makeup		Ring-pull on a can
		Deodorant / aerosol spray
Other activities	Other activities	Other activities
Writing, signing, typing	Using door handle	Lifting children
Using a remote control	Using scissors	Playing video / PS5 games
Dusting	Holding a pint glass / cup of tea	Using hand tools (screwdriver) / Gardening
Using the telephone, texting	Drawing, painting	Sports: rugby, football, swimming, golf, gym
Handling money	Using towel	Using power tools
Playing cards, jigsaw puzzles	Reading books	Pushing a shopping trolley/buggy

Will I need to do any specific exercises?

Your therapist will advise you on specific exercises to help regain movement and use of the thumb. Please ensure you only exercise and use your hand as your therapist has told you.

What else should I do and not do?

- **DO NOT** push your thumb or wrist into a bend with your other hand as this can damage your tendon repair.
- **DO NOT** drive for another four weeks.

Additional instructions

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

You will continue to have regular appointments under the care of the hand therapy team as needed.

Contact us

If you have any questions about recovery after surgical repair of your thumb extensor tendon, please contact treatment enquiries 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.



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 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.

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

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

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

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS UK

The NHS 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: THE_EPL4_04 **Published:** December 2024 **Review date:** December 2026