

Following your child's hand surgery

Information for parents and carers



Who is this leaflet for?

Your child has had surgery to his/her hand. This leaflet gives you some general advice on caring for your child's hand in the early post-operative period and later on when the wound is healed.

How do I look after the dressing?

Following surgery, your child's hand is likely to be in a bulky dressing, possibly with a splint (Plaster of Paris). It is important that you keep this dressing dry and as clean as possible until you come back to clinic or your GP to have it changed. We understand that this can be a challenge with a young, inquisitive child!

At bathtime, try a shallow, quick bath to avoid the dressing getting wet, or place a plastic bag over the arm. Having another adult to help, if possible, is also an excellent way to avoid the dressing getting wet.

If your baby likes to chew the dressing, try a pacifier (dummy) to distract them. You will be given specific instructions on where and when the dressing needs to be changed. Jot these down here so that you don't forget...

Dressing instructions:

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Will my child have any pain or discomfort?

The surgeon will use an injection of anaesthetic to the area at the time of surgery, so that when your child wakes up from the anaesthetic, their hand will not be painful, just numb. This will wear off after a few hours, so start giving liquid paracetamol (Calpol or similar) on a regular basis for the first 2-3 days, so long as your child does not have an allergy. Always follow the dosing guidelines on the bottle. If your child is old enough to keep the hand elevated, do so as this will help with pain control and aid healing by reducing the swelling.

If the surgery was extensive, the anaesthetist will give advice and a prescription for further painkillers, if necessary.

What follow up is needed?

It is important that the surgical team see you and your child again in clinic. This is so that they can fully explain the expected recovery and any rehabilitation needed, and answer any questions you may have. You may also be referred to the Hand Therapy Team, who will likely make a separate appointment to see you.

Follow up appointment:

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What scarring will there be?

All operations that need a cut through the skin leave a permanent scar. In most cases these fade over time to become less noticeable and may even be hard to see. In the case of children, they often form quite lumpy scars at first – this is normal. Lumpy, red scars do flatten over time and there are things that you can do to help this:

- **Scar massage** – once the wound is healed (usually by two weeks), as long as there is no reason not to (such as an unstable joint or wire just under the skin) rub or massage the scar every day. The pressure applied should be firm, enough to make the skin blanch (turn white). About 10 minutes of massage, twice a day, for the first 6 months after healing will help to flatten out the scar. Using a moisturiser can help, but is not essential.
- **Stretching** – depending on where the scar is, stretching exercises may be advised to prevent a tight scar from forming which may cause contracture across a joint.
- **UV protection** – fresh scars are very sensitive to UV and should be covered up when in the sun. Zinc cream, high SPF sunscreen or tape are all effective.

Try to be patient with the scar – it will take months or even years for it to fade and flatten out fully.

What should I look out for?

Following discharge, if you experience an emergency such as a colour change in the fingers or hand, or bleeding through the dressing, attend your GP or Emergency Department urgently, and explain that your child has recently had hand surgery.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

