

# Extensor Tendon Repair Guide

Extensor tendons are found at the back of the hand, fingers and thumb. They allow you to straighten your fingers and thumb and bend your wrist back. After surgical repair a plaster case is applied to the hand to protect the repairs until a thermoplastic splint can be made by the Occupational Therapist. This splint will position the fingers and wrist to protect and prevent stretch of the repaired structures and avoid possible breaking (rupture) of the repaired tendon.

***You must follow the instructions given by your doctor and therapist to get the best result from your surgery.***

## How can I avoid breaking my repaired tendon?

Your repaired tendon is fragile and may come apart again if you do not follow the protection and exercise programme.

- Wear your splint **24 hours per day**
- **DO NOT** remove the splint. When having a shower, wear a plastic bag over the splint and hand to avoid getting it wet.
- **DO NOT** use your repaired hand for function, ie. Do not use your thumb or fingers to pick anything up.
- **DO NOT** do more than the prescribed exercises given by your Hand Therapist. If you do, the risk of rupturing the tendon increases greatly.
- **DO NOT** play sport and avoid activities that have a risk of falling.
- **IT IS DANGEROUS** to drive after an extensor tendon repair.

## How long do I have to wear my splint?

**The splint is to be worn at all times** – usually for about 6 weeks after surgery. You will need to attend hand therapy regularly, so your progress can be monitored and the splint maintained.

From about week 6, with your doctor's / therapist's approval, you may only need to wear the splint at night and for occasional protection in public places. Active bending of your fingers out of the splint will begin and you can use your hand for light tasks only such as showering, getting dressed, reading a book etc. **This is one of the most risky times for tendon rupture because it is easy to overuse the hand when the splint first comes off.**

From 8-12 weeks after surgery, your splint can be discarded and resistance will be gradually added to your exercise regime. Activities using your hand can slowly be increased.

## When can I return to:

### Driving?

About 8-12 weeks after the repair but only with permission from your surgeon

### Work?

Depends on the type of work you do – see your surgeon as a medical clearance may be necessary.

## Playing sport?

About 3 months (12 weeks) after the repair with permission from your surgeon.

## Will my tendon ever be full strength?

No, repaired extensor tendons only regain about 90% of their original strength. However, they are strong enough to do most things by 3 months after the repair. In some instances (ie. If you do very heavy work), there may be a few precautions after the 3 month mark, but these occur only in isolated cases and should be discussed with your surgeon.

## What exercises do I need to do?

Your Hand Therapist will give you different exercises at each stage of healing that will help you to get the best result from your repair. It is therefore very important that you attend your outpatient appointments.

## Why are exercises important?

- Exercises help prevent joints from stiffening.
- Exercising the fingers improves circulation in the hand, necessary for tendon healing.
- The controlled motion of tendons can create a stronger repair.
- Exercises can help to reduce the swelling.
- Exercises and scar massage can help prevent the scar tissue from the tendon sticking to other structures in the hand. Scar tissue can lead to loss of finger movement.

**If you have any reason to suspect that the tendon repair has snapped, please contact your GP or the Accident & Emergency Department IMMEDIATELY. DO NOT WAIT OVERNIGHT.**