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e.g. large print, please phone
01935 384256

ADVICE FOR PATIENTS FOLLOWING HAND INJURY AND/OR SURGERY

Contact Numbers:

Yeovil District Hospital	01935 475122
Physiotherapy Department	Ext 4358
Occupational Therapy Department	Ext 4215
Charlton Ward (6A)	Ext 4322
Misterton Ward (6B)	Ext 4385
Orthopaedic Clinic	Ext 4319

Hand Therapy Service

www.yeovilhospital.nhs.uk

INTRODUCTION

The following advice is very important if your hand is to heal to its full potential. Please read this leaflet carefully and if there is any thing that you do not understand, or should you require further information, please speak to your physiotherapist or consultant.

WHAT IS SWELLING?

Following an operation or injury, swelling may form in your hand during the early healing process. It is an accumulation of watery fluid under the skin and can become thick and sticky if not quickly dispersed out of the hand. If it remains, it may cause permanent stiffness to both the damaged and neighbouring parts of your hand and arm.

TO HELP DISPERSE SWELLING

- keep your hand above your heart when standing and walking. You may be supplied with a collar and cuff to assist you with this. This should be removed hourly so that you can perform shoulder and elbow exercises as instructed by your physiotherapist
- when sitting or lying, support your arm and hand on pillows at heart height
- if you feel your dressings or splint are becoming tight, contact the Physiotherapy Department immediately. This can cause swelling or prevent its removal

Fingers

Individual movements for the finger/s

- bend and straighten the tip of your finger while supporting it below the crease
- bend and straighten the middle joint of your finger while supporting it below the crease
- keeping your fingers straight, bend your knuckles

Combined movements for the finger/s

Place the back of your hand on a table and:

- straighten your fingers aiming to touch the table
- bend the tips of your fingers so that the pads of your fingers touch the palm (hook grip) and then straighten
- bend your fingers to make a fist and then straighten
- bend your fingers towards your wrist and then straighten

Other Exercises

- Other advice

Remember to keep the hand elevated 24 hours/day until advised otherwise by your physiotherapist.

SPLINTS

If you are supplied with a splint, please use it as follows:

DO NOT adapt or tamper with the splint. If you have a problem with the splint, or are experiencing any of the following, please contact the Occupational Therapy Department:

- a rash, red, blistered or broken skin
- increased pain
- swelling
- the splint breaks

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE FOR MY HAND TO HEAL?

Skin wounds usually heal by 10-14 days. This is when stitches (sutures) are usually removed.

Sometimes wires are used to hold bone together to allow healing. These protrude outside the skin and remain in place for 2 - 8 weeks.

Hands take up to 3 months to heal and often much longer to become mobile and strong.

Healing occurs best when:

- swelling is minimal
- exercises are performed
- smoking is avoided
- infection is treated promptly

Infection may be present if you notice the following:

- increased pain
- increased swelling
- heat and redness
- 'flu-like' symptoms

If any of the above are present, or if in doubt, contact your physiotherapist.

WHEN CAN I DRIVE OR OPERATE MACHINERY?

You may not be safe or covered by your insurance initially. Generally, when all stitches, wires, dressings and splints are removed, your physiotherapist or consultant will be able to advise you. If you are in doubt, check first.

HOW SHOULD I EXERCISE MY HAND?

The exercises indicated by should be performed hourly or times per day.

Shoulder

- stretch your arm above your head
- place your hand behind your back
- place your hand behind your neck

Elbow

- bend and straighten your elbow

Forearm

- with your elbow bent to 90° by your side, turn your palm towards the ceiling and then to face the floor

Wrist

- move your wrist backwards and forwards
- move your wrist side to side

Thumb

- touch the tips of your fingers with your thumb
- when you can touch your little finger, then slide your thumb down towards your palm
- place the palm of your hand flat on the table and spread your thumb away from your index finger