

# DUPUYTREN'S DISEASE

**The problem.**

Dupuytren's disease is an abnormal thickening of the tissue just beneath the skin of the hand. It can cause the fingers to curl and eventually prevents you from straightening them.

**What does treatment involve?**

Treatment usually involves surgery in which all the effected tissue is removed. Sometimes splints are used prior to surgery to help slow the progression of the deformity. These methods aim to control the disease as there is no cure. Surgery is performed under a general anaesthetic and a series of zig-zag incisions are made in the hand in order to allow the diseased tissue to be removed. The wounds are closed with non-dissolving sutures which are removed approximately 2 weeks later. An area in the palm of the hand is usually not closed and is allowed to heal by itself. This can take between 4-6 weeks. You will require regular dressings for this period. If the skin is also involved or you have recurrent disease we sometimes use a full thickness skin graft taken from your groin area to cover the skin loss in the hand. This can sometimes result in a slight mismatch in skin colour but the disease rarely recurs in this grafted area. The surgery usually takes about 60 minutes for each finger involved.

**What happens after surgery?**

You will wake up with your hand in a padded bandage or on occasion a plaster of Paris splint. You will usually be able to go home later the same day. It is very important that you keep the hand elevated to reduce swelling and pain and will be provided with a sling and pain killers. It is important you keep the dressing clean and dry for at least the first week and you can shower with a plastic bag over the hand. You will be fitted with a plastic splint soon after surgery and this must be worn at night for at least 3 months. You will require regular simple dressing changes and the sutures will be removed at approximately 2 weeks.

**What are the advantages?**

In most instances the finger will be fully straight and you should have full and normal movement back in the hand.

**What are the complications?**

In a small number of patients with advanced disease it is not possible to get the finger out fully straight. The disease can also recur in the same digit or another digit in either hand. The nerves that supply sensation to the finger are often stuck in the diseased tissue and it is common to have some temporary numbness after surgery. In long standing or recurrent cases the nerve is at risk of damage during surgery leading to permanent numbness. All surgery carries a small risk of bleeding and infection, but in hand surgery this is very low (less than 1%). Sometimes thick scars can develop, especially if the wounds have been slow to heal, and this can result in a prolonged rehabilitation period. Rarely, a condition known as Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome can develop which is treated with intensive hand therapy.