



# Trapeziectomy: aftercare advice

## Information for patients

You have undergone surgery to remove the small bone at the base of your thumb. Over the next few weeks you will be given advice by your therapist about your rehabilitation and the management of your hand. Getting a good result from this surgery is directly related to the effort you put into your rehabilitation, so please follow the advice and guidance below.

### When can I return to my daily activities?

- Recovery from this operation can be slow. It can often be three to six months before you can start **normal heavy activities** again.
- Most patients are able to **return to driving** eight weeks after their operation. However this is a decision made by your surgeon or therapist.
- When you can **return to work** depends on the job you do, and should be discussed with your surgeon or therapist.

### Two to six weeks after your surgery

- Two weeks after your operation **your plaster will be replaced with a lighter thermoplastic splint**. This splint must be worn continuously for a further four weeks, but may be removed each day for washing.
- You may have **dissolvable stitches**, which will gradually fall out and disappear around two weeks after your surgery. If you have **non-dissolving sutures**, these will be taken out either by your therapist at your follow-up appointment, or by the nurse at your GP surgery around two weeks after your surgery. If you have them removed by your GP practice nurse, you will need to book this appointment yourself.
- Compared to non-smokers, smokers are more likely to have complications in tissue healing and infections after surgery. For free friendly support and medication to help you stop smoking, contact One You Kent Smokefree Call: 0300 123 1220 Email: [oneyoukent@nhs.net](mailto:oneyoukent@nhs.net) Visit: [www.oneyoukent.org.uk](http://www.oneyoukent.org.uk)



- **Elevating (raising) your hand** is important to prevent swelling and stiffness in your fingers. Remember not to walk with your hand dangling down by your side, and do not sit with your hand held in your lap.



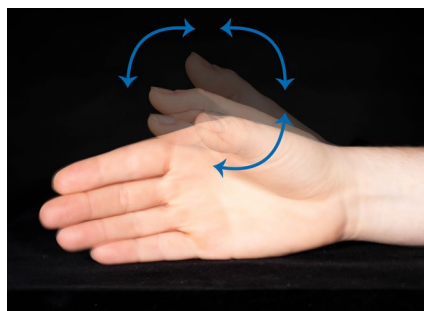
- Using a **small amount of cream** (such as E45 or Diprobase), massage your scar in deep circular motions. This helps prevent hypersensitivity, and the tendons becoming stuck to surrounding structures and causing problems with the movement of your hand.

### Exercises: two to six weeks after your surgery

- These exercises should not be painful, but may feel slightly uncomfortable.
- Always exercise gently and slowly.
- Remove your splint every three hours to do the exercises below, as well as the activities above.

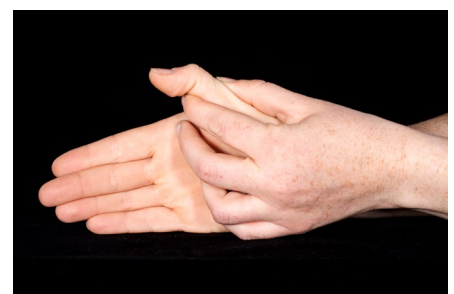
1. Bend and straighten your shoulder and elbow 10 times.
2. Bend and straighten all fingers 10 times.

3. With your hand on its side, hold your fingers comfortably out of the way and make small circles with your thumb for one minute.



4. Hold your thumb below the joint to be exercised.

Bend and straighten the upper joint 10 times.



5. With your hand flat on a table, try to move your thumb away from the rest of your hand and back together 10 times.

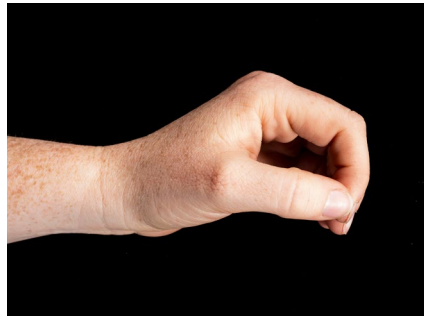


6. With your hand on its side, move your thumb sideways away from your palm and back in again 10 times.

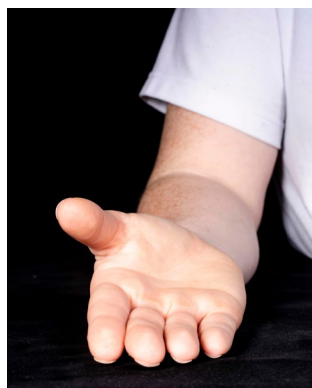


7. Place your hand on its side on a table, with the tip of your thumb touching the tip of your index finger.

Try to roll your thumb, moving from a 'D' shape to an 'O' shape between your thumb and index finger. Hold for three seconds, 10 times.



8. With your palm up flat on the table try to flatten your thumb back, so that the back of your thumb touches the table 10 times.



**It is normal for these exercises to be uncomfortable, but they should not cause pain. If they do:**

- Try more gentler / smaller movements, with less repetition. Build up slowly.
- If your wound has healed fully and the dressings are off, you can do the exercises after warming your hand up in warm water or using a heat pack. This can help with pain and stiffness.

## Exercises: six to 12 weeks after your surgery

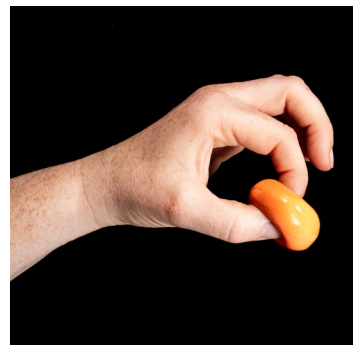
- Continue the exercises on pages 2 and 3, and add the following.
- These exercises should not be painful, but may feel slightly uncomfortable.
- Always exercise gently and slowly.
- Complete each exercise three times a day, 10 times.

1. Touch the tip of each finger in turn with your thumb.



2. Start with your hand on its side on a table and the tip of your thumb touching the tip of your index finger.

Try to roll your thumb, moving from a 'D' shape to an 'O' shape between your thumb and index finger, and gently pinch. You can use playdoh, a sponge, or a light stress ball to help with this.



3. Hold your hand and forearm palm up. Using your other hand, stretch your affected thumb out to the side, away from your palm, pushing from the base of your thumb.

Hold for 10 seconds and repeat three times.



**It is normal for these exercises to be uncomfortable, but they should not cause pain. If they do:**

- Try more gentler / smaller movements, with less repetition. Build up slowly.
- If your wound has healed fully and the dressings are off, you can do the exercises after warming your hand up in warm water or using a heat pack. This can help with pain and stiffness.

## Six to 12 weeks after your surgery

- With the advice of your therapist or doctor, **your splint** is removed during the day. Keep the splint on at night until eight weeks after your surgery.
- After week six, you may use your hand for **very light activities only** (do not lift anything heavier than 0.5kg to 1kg in weight).
- Be careful when doing activities that involve **a lateral key grip**, such as using a key, holding a book / newspaper, or holding a plate.
- **Increase your level of activity** as shown by your therapist, but do not do more than your pain allows.
- Avoid **heavy pinch grips** (for example holding a book open or tearing open packets) **and lifting** (see above) until 12 weeks after your surgery.
- Continue **scar massage** as shown by your therapist. Your scar may still feel tender at this stage, this is normal.

## Will I have follow-up appointments?

Yes. How many appointments you have and how often you have them will depend on your recovery, and will be discussed with your therapist at your first follow-up appointment.

## Further information

If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to ask your therapist.

**This leaflet has been produced with and for patients**

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**Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments** please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email [ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net)

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**Further patient leaflets** are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site [www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation](http://www.ekhuft.nhs.uk/patientinformation)