Thumb extensor tendon injury

Extensor tendon injury
The extensor tendons in your hand are very important. They attach the muscles to the bone and allow you to straighten your thumb.

Recovery
Your damaged tendons have been repaired. It will take around 12 weeks for them to heal fully. During this time, there is a risk that the tendons could rupture (break) and your wrist and fingers could become stiff. To reduce the risk of rupture you will be provided with a thermoplastic splint to protect the tendons. You should wear your splint all the time, until your hand therapist agrees that you can remove it.

Recovery guidelines
These are guidelines only. Your hand therapist will help and advise you at every stage of your recovery.

Days after operation (rest and elevation in plaster back slab)

First five days
Do not move your wrist. A nurse will check your wound and you will be given a thermoplastic splint. Your hand therapist may give you exercises for your fingers. Straighten and bend your fingers.

Ten to fourteen days
A nurse will check your wound and will remove your stitches, and with advice from your therapist you can start to massage your scar. You can also begin to carefully wash your hand.

Four weeks
You will be seen by your therapist who will give you additional exercises for your fingers and wrist. You can remove the splint during these exercises.

Six weeks
You can begin to use your hand for light function, such as eating, dressing and writing. No heavy or resisted use of the hand. You must wear your splint for protection when at risk of injury, for example when sleeping, travelling, or in crowded places. Your hand therapist will advise when you can return to work for light duties.

Eight weeks
At this stage you should be able to discard the splint and increase functional use of your hand. You can return to work as discussed with your therapist. No heavy duties or lifting.
Ten weeks
Return to manual work and driving if safe.

Twelve weeks
Return to contact sports.

Exercise guidelines
The repaired tendons may stick to tissue in the hand as they heal. It’s important to exercise the fingers and wrist in a controlled way to prevent this happening. Your therapist will show you specific exercises to help with your recovery, and give you a personalised exercise programme to complete.

Don’t use your injured hand for anything but the exercises instructed by your therapist. Don’t move your wrist until advised to do so.

Exercises
1. Actively bend your fingers towards the palm and then straighten again.
2. Lift your arm above your head regularly to keep your shoulder moving.
3. Bend and straighten your elbow regularly to keep your elbow moving.
4. With your forearm tucked in by your side and the elbow bent, turn your palm up towards the ceiling and then down towards the floor, keeping the elbow still.

Repeat times…………….. every hour.

Splint care
Your splint should be worn at all times (night and day) to protect your repaired tendons. When bathing or showering, place a plastic bag over the splint to keep it dry.

If you have any problems with the splint, or any other questions or concerns, please contact the hand therapy department.

Therapist:                                              Date:

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