



Advice following carpal tunnel decompression surgery

This leaflet gives post-operative advice following carpal tunnel decompression surgery. During your operation your surgeon made an incision in the palm of the hand in order to release the transverse ligament or ‘roof’ of the tunnel to allow the nerve more space.

What happens after discharge?

After surgery, your hand will be bandaged and you will have a sling. We recommend keeping the hand elevated in the sling for the first couple of days. You can remove the outer bulky dressing after three days. **You must keep the dressings clean and dry for two weeks.** After two weeks, you can wash the hand and the stitches will dissolve.

There should not be too much pain after the surgery; however, it may be sensible to take painkillers before bedtime if you require it.

In the rare occurrence that you experience any problems with your wound, contact the practice nurse at your GP's surgery.

Recovery after surgery

- **0-2 weeks:** It is important to keep the fingers moving immediately after surgery. However, be careful not to overuse the hand during the first two weeks as it may cause an increase in scarring and pain.
- **2-6 weeks:** If you are using the hand and it hurts then you are probably overdoing it. We encourage you to use the hand but not overdo it. We recommend that you massage the scar area once the scab has come off to improve sensitivity and flexibility. Using an unscented moisturising lotion may help with this.

Carpal tunnel release post-op exercises / hand therapy

Visit www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZgQloCkzjXg or scan the QR code for a short video that shows you what to do after surgery in order to get the best outcome.



Work:

You should be back at work between two and six weeks, depending on your job. If you need a fit note / certificate for time off work – ask the nurse before you are discharged. Further certificates can be provided by your GP.

Driving:

You must not drive while your hand is in the bandage. After this, you can resume driving as soon as you feel comfortable and feel safe to control a vehicle. This will be at least two weeks after surgery,

but can take longer. It is your responsibility to be safe and in control of your vehicle.

Return to sport:

You are able to return to sporting activities once the pain and swelling has settled.

Follow-up appointment

It is normal for your hand and wrist to feel stiff and weak for around three months after surgery. This normally improves with increased use of your hand again and as the scar sensitivity settles. However, if you still have ongoing concerns and functional restrictions after a few months, you can call the Orthopaedic Administration Team (CAT 5) to arrange a follow-up appointment to be reviewed. You will be left on a Patient Initiated Follow-Up (PIFU) pathway for one year after your surgery, so that you can get in touch for an appointment if required.

Please contact CAT 5 on 0118 322 7415 or email rbb-tr.cat5@nhs.net if you wish to make a PIFU appointment to have your hand reviewed in clinic.

What to look out for after carpal tunnel decompression

- After your carpal tunnel release, the tingling / pins and needles symptoms should settle very quickly. If your symptoms do not settle or worsen, please get in contact.
- The scar may be sensitive to direct pressure for several weeks and it often takes three months before you can press up on the heel of the hand. Massaging the scar helps with this.
- Decompression surgery has a high success rate of 95%; however, sometimes it does not fully relieve the symptoms, especially if they have been present for a long time. In approximately 3% (3 out of every 100) cases there is a risk of recurrence in the future, which may require further surgery.
- **If your hand becomes red, hot, swollen or more painful than usual, contact your GP urgently for advice.**

Useful numbers and contacts

Adult Day Surgery Unit (RBH): 0118 322 7622 (Open 7am-10pm)

Day Surgery Unit (WBCH): 01635 273492/3/4

Redlands Ward: 0118 322 7484 / 7485

Pre-Op Assessment Clinic: 0118 322 6546 / 6812 preopsouthwing@royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Clinical Admin Team (CAT 5): 0118 322 7415 email: rbb-tr.cat5@nhs.net

If you have any concerns during the first 24 hours of your discharge please phone the ward /unit you were admitted to. After 24 hours, please seek advice from your GP.

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Orthopaedic Unit / Physiotherapy, July 2025. Next review due: July 2027.