



SURGERY

# Flexor tenolysis

## What does this involve?

The flexor (bending) tendons of the fingers normally run within a smooth tunnel system (sheath). Flexor tenolysis is an operation performed to free these tendons from scar tissue to allow them to run smoothly again and bend the finger properly.

## When is this surgery needed?

You can see from the diagram below that the soft tissues on the front of each finger are very precisely arranged to allow normal motion.

Any injury (stretches, sprains, dislocations, breaks or surgery) will damage the soft tissues to a greater or lesser extent.

After damage to a finger (injury or surgery) the healing soft tissues tend to thicken up becoming less supple and flexible. In addition, scar tissue forms which may cause

surfaces that normally glide past each other to become attached to each other. These attachments are called adhesions. All of this can limit the movement of the fingers and so interfere with how your hand works.

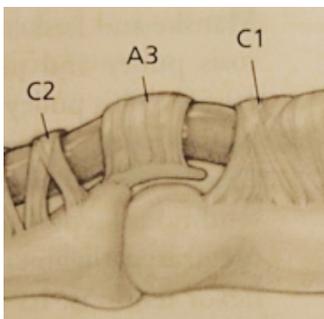
With minor injuries you just notice a slight stiffness for a few weeks that gradually wears off as you use the finger normally.

With more significant injuries stiffness can be a real problem. If you are not aware of the importance of stretching scar tissue as it forms, or are unable to perform these early stretching

exercises (for instance whilst a broken bone is healing), the scar tissue can become very tough. Your hand therapist will try and help with these exercises.

After around 6 months scar tissue can become so tough that stretching alone no longer improves the flexibility of the finger. If you still have a very stiff finger after that point an operation to release this scar tissue may be considered.

## Side view of joint with tendons passing through pulleys within a sheath



### Type of Operation

Day case

### Length of Procedure

0.5 – 1 hour (depending on how much scar tissue needs to be released)

### Anaesthesia

Local or Regional Anaesthetic



## What are the main risks of this operation?

### *Swelling, Stiffness and Scar pain*

This can be reduced by keeping the arm elevated and moving all the free joints as soon as possible. In most people the general swelling reduces dramatically in the first week after the operation.

Local swelling around the surgical site can persist for several months. Local swelling can be helped by massaging the tissues and this may also improve any irritability in the surgical scar.

Occasionally patients are troubled by more swelling and stiffness than average. In this case complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS) is sometimes the cause (see relevant information sheet in 'Conditions we Treat'). Severe CRPS occurs in less than 1% of cases.

### *Infection*

This is unusual in the hand (less than 1% of cases). Local wound infections can often be treated with oral antibiotics. Rare, deep seated infections may require re-admission to hospital, antibiotics into the vein and occasionally more surgery.

### *Nerve Damage*

There might be a small patch of numbness next to the scar after this surgery. The nerves to the tip of the finger/thumb are close to the tendons but injury to these nerves is very unlikely if your surgery is undertaken by an experienced hand surgeon.

### *Adhesions/recurrent stiffness*

Even with your best efforts and the help of the hand therapists, stiffness and adhesions can recur after surgery. Further surgery may be required in some cases.

## Post Operative Course

### *Day 1 – 14*

- A dressing is applied after the operation
- Keep the dressings clean and dry
- Keep the arm elevated in a sling or on pillows to reduce swelling
- Start moving all the joints that are not immobilised as soon as possible to prevent stiffness
- Take painkillers before the anaesthetic wears off and as necessary thereafter

### *10 – 14 Days*

- An appointment will be made for you to see the hand therapy team
- They will check your wound and start further rehabilitation.

### *3 Months*

- By this stage most people will have returned to most activities.
- Hand therapy will continue if needed.

### *Driving*

You may drive when you feel confident to control the car, even in an emergency. For this surgery it can be up to two months before many people feel this confident. The Hand Therapy team will discuss this with you in more detail.

You should discuss it with your insurer if you are considering driving with a splint in place.

### *Time off Work*

This will vary depending on the nature of your job.

Sick notes can be provided on the day of your operation, at your clinic visits and by your own GP.