

# Surgery for carpal tunnel syndrome

## Information for patients, relatives and carers

### Introduction

This leaflet explains what surgery for carpal tunnel syndrome involves and what to expect afterwards. We hope it answers any questions you or those who care for you may have. If you have any further questions about the information below please contact us using the details on page 5.

### How should I prepare for surgery?

Please remove any nail varnish, rings and false nails.

You will be limited in how you can use your hand in the first few days after the surgery so it is useful to think about preparing your house in advance. For example, loosen the lids on jars and bottles that you may use or remove the plastic seal off your milk bottle.

### On the day of your surgery

**We advise you to bring a friend or relative with you. Please note we do not have crèche or childcare facilities so please arrange childcare for that day. If you do not arrange childcare we will have to reschedule your surgery.**

Please bring a list of your medications with you and tell us about any medications you are taking which thin your blood or any conditions you have that interfere with bleeding.

Your appointment letter tells you what time to come to Charing Cross Hospital. When you arrive, please follow the signs for Riverside wing – the entrance is to the right of the main hospital entrance. There is a map on page 5 of this leaflet. When you arrive please check-in at the reception desk.

We will let you know what the wait time is (if any) when you arrive.

### Before your operation

We will explain the operation to you in detail and answer any questions you have. We will then ask you to sign a consent form. No surgery or any other treatment can be given without your consent.

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## What happens during the operation?

The operation lasts 20 minutes and is typically done under local anaesthetic as a day case, meaning you can go home the same day. We begin by injecting some local anaesthetic around your wrist to numb the area. You may still feel some pressure / vibration during the procedure but you should not feel pain.

The local anaesthetic takes about ten minutes to work and we will check this with you before we start. We apply a tourniquet during the operation, which is like a blood pressure cuff. This can feel uncomfortable after about 15 to 20 minutes so let us know if it is and we will adjust it.

You will be lying down during the operation. There will be a nurse present during the operation to ensure you are comfortable.

The doctor begins the operation by making a small cut at the base of your palm and releasing the ligament which is causing pressure over the nerve. The skin is closed with several stitches and a light dressing is applied, followed by a bulky bandage. You can remove the bulky bandage three days after your surgery but keep the small dressing in place for two weeks. Please make an advance appointment with your GP or practice nurse to have your stitches removed two weeks after your surgery.

The local anaesthetic will last for a few hours but some people may still feel the effects the next day.

## What are the benefits of surgery?

Symptoms such as tingling or pain in your fingertips, which wakes you at night, usually get better very quickly. Surgery aims to stop your symptoms from getting worse, particularly if you have any muscle weakness.

## What are the risks involved in having surgery?

As with any operation there are risks of bleeding, infection and scarring but these are typically very low in this type of surgery.

The risks specific to carpal tunnel surgery include:

- pain around the surgery site
- symptoms not settling
- symptoms returning
- complex regional pain syndrome (on-going severe pain, extremely rare)
- nerve damage (extremely rare)

Your consultant will explain the risks before your surgery and answer any questions you have.

You will have a scar after your surgery that is approximately two centimetres long. It is normal for this scar to be sensitive at first but this will normally settle down within four to six weeks. This will usually fade over time but will never disappear.

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## Can I eat and drink as normal after the operation?

You can eat and drink normally after the operation and we usually provide you with a cup of tea and a biscuit before you leave the hospital.

## Travelling home after surgery

We advise you to have someone to accompany you home after your surgery.

## What should I look out for at home?

It is normal to have some slight discomfort after surgery once the local anaesthetic wears off. We advise you to take painkillers such as paracetamol if you need them and to keep your hand elevated (raised). It is good to use your hand for light activities such as eating, drinking, dressing, typing and writing as soon as possible after the operation.

Perform the exercises below five times each, every two hours until you are able to complete them easily.



It is normal to experience some unusual sensations after surgery, such as burning or tingling in your fingers and hand as the nerve is recovering. However, if you develop any symptoms or signs of infection you should contact your GP. This would include:

- redness, spreading beyond the wound
- an unpleasant smell coming from the wound
- yellow discharge coming from the wound
- increased temperature of the wound
- generally feeling unwell with a temperature

## How long do I need to keep my dressings on for?

You should keep the bulky bandage in place for three days then remove this at home yourself. You should keep the single layer dressing in place until you see your GP to have your stitches removed after two weeks. You should keep the wound clean and dry until this point.

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You can have a bath or shower 24 hours after your surgery but you should cover your hand with a plastic bag or a rubber glove.

If your single layer dressing comes loose, gets dirty or wet it can be replaced. Its purpose is to keep your wound clean and protect the stitches from irritation. You can buy a replacement dressing from your local pharmacy.

## When can I go back to work?

If your work is desk-based you can return as soon as it is comfortable to do so. For those in more manual work we advise that you wait until after your stitches are removed but this also depends on the type of manual work you do. You should always think about whether you are safe to perform your duties.

## When can I drive again?

We recommend waiting for two weeks and until you can make a firm fist. It may be wise to check with your car insurance company beforehand to make sure there are no restrictions.

## How do I care for my scar?

Once the stitches are removed after two weeks you should start to massage the scar. You should use a simple moisturising cream such as E45 or Nivea®. Apply the cream to the scar and use your thumb or finger to massage the scar in small circles. Apply enough pressure so that the skin goes white. You should spend between 10 and 15 minutes doing this each day, in short sessions of two to three minutes each. It is normal for the scar to be very sensitive in the first two to four weeks after surgery and this will improve with massage.

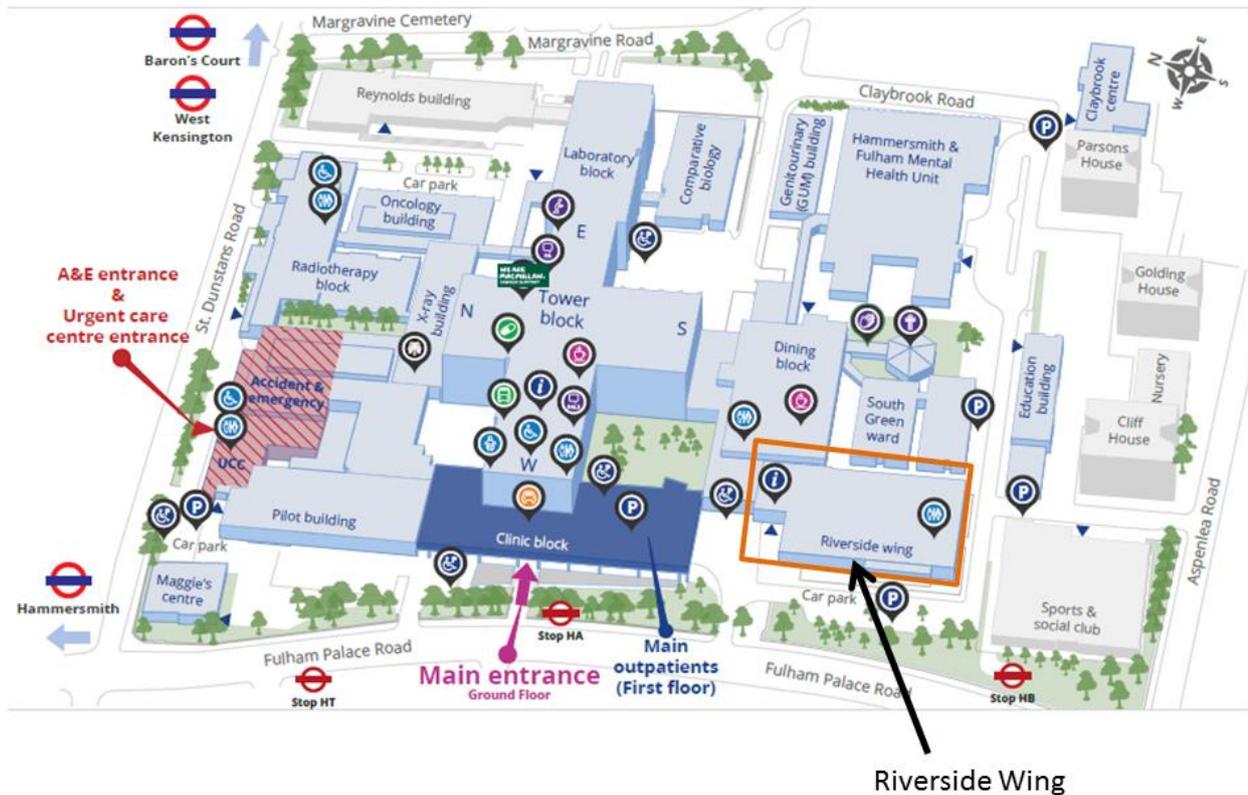
## Who should I contact if I have a problem at home?

Most patients recover quickly after their surgery and without complications which is why we do not offer routine follow-up appointments. If you have any concerns about your wound (see page 3), please contact your GP.

You may experience some discomfort in the area in the first two to four weeks after your operation but this should settle after six weeks. It can take longer for the sensation to improve and this will often depend on the severity of your symptoms before the surgery.

If you are experiencing pain that is worse than before the surgery or if you have not returned to using your hand normally for light activities (eating, drinking, dressing, etc.) by six weeks then please contact us: [imperial.carpaltunnelclinic@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.carpaltunnelclinic@nhs.net)

## Find us in Riverside Wing, Charing Cross Hospital



## How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at [imperial.pals@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.pals@nhs.net) The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department  
Fourth floor  
Salton House  
St Mary's Hospital  
Praed Street  
London W2 1NY

Email: [ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net)

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

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## Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:

[imperial.communications@nhs.net](mailto:imperial.communications@nhs.net)

## Wi-fi

We have a free wi-fi service for basic filtered browsing and a premium wi-fi service (requiring payment) at each of our five hospitals. Look for WiFiSPARK\_FREE or WiFiSPARK\_PREMIUM