

Finger and thumb amputation / terminalisation



Information for patients
The Sheffield Hand Centre



PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



What is a finger or thumb amputation?

An amputation is the removal of all or part of a finger or thumb. This can also be known as a terminalisation.

Why are amputations needed?

- Significant cuts or crush injuries where the finger is too severely damaged to be able to repair it.
- Direct trauma resulting in loss of all or part of a digit.
- Severe infections resulting in tissue loss or not treatable by antibiotics alone.
- Planned amputations for stiff or painful fingers that restrict hand function.
- Cancers involving the fingers or thumb.

What does the surgery involve?

Most finger and thumb amputations can be performed under local anaesthetic (you are awake). This means you are given an injection at the base of the digit to make it numb.

During surgery the wound will be cleaned and the digit shortened as much as is necessary to close the wound.

Sometimes a skin graft (from your arm) or a skin flap (moving local tissue near the wound) may be used to close your wound.

Small wounds are often left open and heal without the need for complex surgery over 4 to 6 weeks. You may have stitches that require later removal and a dressing will be applied.

What will happen after surgery?

- Your finger may be sore for the first few days following surgery. You are advised to take simple, over-the-counter, painkillers (such as paracetamol or ibuprofen) regularly for the first 48 hours or longer if you need to.
- If you were given a course of antibiotics when you first had the injury, it is important that you finish the course.
- Keep your hand elevated above the level of your heart for the next couple of days after surgery. This helps to reduce swelling and pain.
- It is important to continue moving your arm and the unaffected joints in your hand to prevent them from becoming stiff.
- When washing or showering, keep the dressing dry by covering your affected hand with a plastic bag taped around the wrist.
- The dressing put on in theatre should remain in place until you are seen again in the dressings clinic after about one week.

We will check the wounds and change the dressing. If necessary, the nurses will make further appointments to check your wound.

Is there anything to look out for after surgery?

- **Bleeding:** It is quite common for there to be a small amount of bleeding into the dressing for a couple of hours after the operation. If this happens, put your hand above heart level and squeeze your fingertip for 10 minutes. If the dressing becomes soaked with blood, please contact the Sheffield Hand Centre on **0114 305 2364**.
- **Infection:** The risk of an infection is reduced by completing any course of antibiotics you have been prescribed. If you notice increasing pain, an unpleasant smell or yellow fluid coming through the dressing, please contact us on the phone number above.
- **Cold intolerance:** Your affected finger/hand may become painfully cold in the winter months. This may settle with time and is best avoided by keeping your hands warm. Wear an extra glove on the affected hand or an extra layer over the finger.
- **Altered sensation:** You may not have feeling in the new finger tip or this may be very sensitive to touch or temperature. This can improve with time and therapy.
- **Swelling:** Some swelling is normal. Your doctor, nurse or therapist will advise you on how this can be addressed.

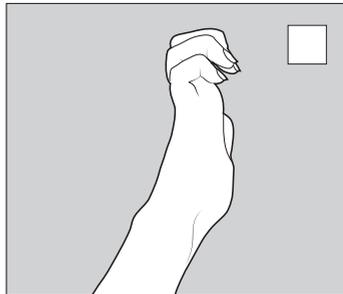
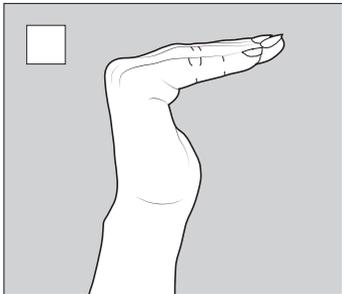
Please be aware that all levels of amputation can cause psychological effects: flash backs, increased anxiety, avoidance, sleeplessness and/or nightmares.

Please talk to your consultant, nurse, therapist or GP if you are experiencing any of these symptoms.

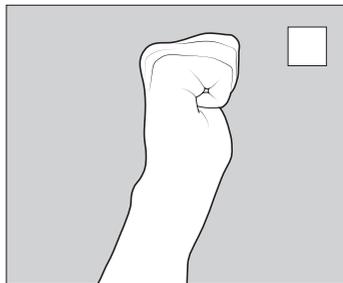
What can I do after my injury?

Exercises: The type of the amputation you have had will determine if you need therapy. **We advise you to complete the exercises and desensitisation advice below.**

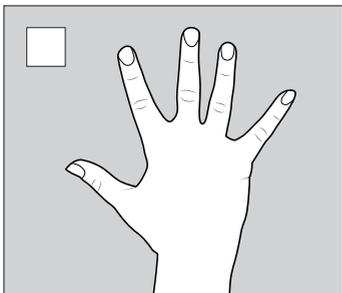
1. Keeping your fingers straight, bend at the knuckles.
2. Bend the tips and middle joints of the fingers, then straighten them.



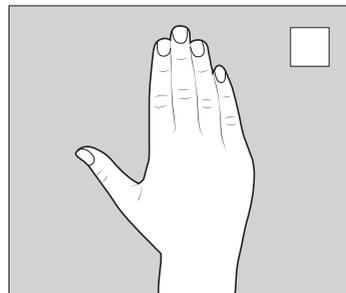
3. Make a fist, then straighten your fingers.



4. Spread your fingers apart.

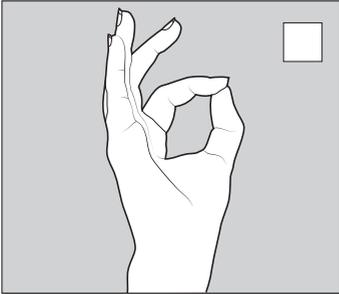


5. Bring your fingers together.

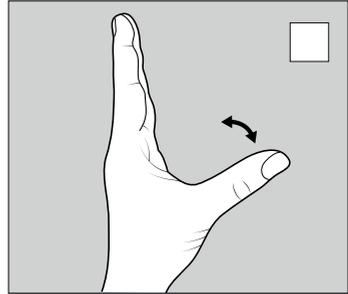


Thumb

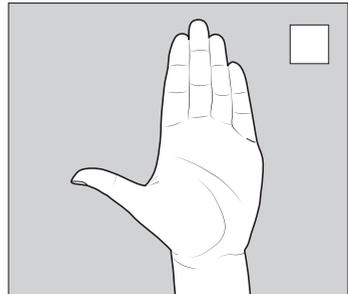
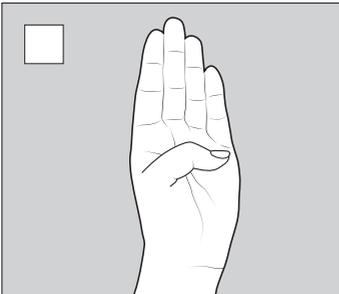
1. Touch your thumb to each finger tip.



2. Bend and straighten your thumb tip.



3. Reach your thumb across your palm and then stretch out to the side.



We advise that the exercises and the desensitisation is carried out while the dressing is in place, a few times per day and that you look at your finger when doing so.

The exercises and desensitisation can be increased once the dressing is removed.

Desensitisation Techniques

Pressure

Using a finger/thumb, apply pressure to the tender area of your hand. Hold for about 15 seconds. Start around the sensitive area and gradually work inwards. Do this continuously for 5 minutes.

Light touch

Using a finger/thumb, massage a non-perfumed moisturiser cream in circular movements. Start around the sensitive area and gradually work inwards. Do this continuously for 5 minutes.

Texture Therapy (once dressing removed)

For this you can use a range of textures around your home or workplace (cottonwool, a silk scarf, denim, fleeces, beads, hair, scourers, newspaper, metal cutlery etc). Rank the textures in order of discomfort.

1. Start with a texture that is easier to tolerate and make a few small circles over the sensitive area. Alternate pressing firmly with pressing lightly. Do this continuously for 2 to 3 minutes.
2. Over time, once this becomes more tolerable, move on to a texture that is more uncomfortable and repeat the above process. Repeat this process continuing to progress through the various textures.

Tapping

We advise that you tap the affected finger on different surfaces, such as your leg or the table. Typing on a keyboard or on your touch screen is also advised.

In the early stages of treatment the therapist may recommend covering the sensitive area (with a pressure glove or padding for example), to enable you to return to normal activities.

Functional advice

It is important, once the wound has healed, to use your hand where possible or as pain allows in daily activities. This will assist your exercises and desensitisation and speed up your recovery.

What are the long term effects?

- Altered sensation can last for up to 18 months
- Cold intolerance may also last for up to 18 months
- In some cases you can be referred to Anaplastology for consideration of a prosthetic finger(s).

If you have any of the above mentioned issues, please contact the Hand Therapy Department:

- **0114 305 2381**
- **tsopd@NHS.net**

A receptionist will take your details and you will be contacted by a therapist.



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