

# Flexor Sheath

## Washout

### Hand Therapy Patient Information

#### What is a Flexor sheath washout?

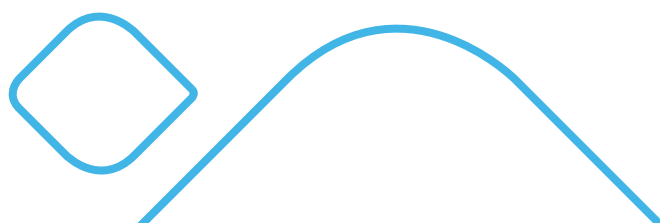
A flexor sheath washout is an operation to clean out an infection within the flexor sheaths. These sheaths are tunnels that the flexor tendons move through to bend our fingers. The tunnels hold the tendons in position, protect and nourish the tendons, so that they can glide smoothly. You are likely to be given a course of antibiotics and told to take pain-killers like Paracetamol regularly to manage any pain while the recovery takes place.

You will also work closely with a Hand Therapist to ensure you regain your movement and function, whilst managing your wounds and pain.



#### What happens when a flexor sheath becomes infected?

When someone gets a flexor sheath infection, pus and infected material build up inside the flexor sheaths and causing swelling, pain and restricted gliding of tendons. This will reduce movement and use of the hand.





## Post-operation Management

The dressings applied after your surgery are normally removed around 10-14 days after the operation. If you were given a sling, you can wear this for comfort over the first two weeks but you **do not** need to wear this full-time.

You will be referred to Hand Therapy to help you manage the following symptoms.

- **Pain:** take pain relief regularly. Your therapist can discuss this with you.
- **Swelling:** keep your hand elevated to help reduce swelling, especially when resting/sitting down.
- **Signs of infection:** if your wound or affected finger becomes red, hot, swollen and painful and starts to produce pus, or you feel unwell in yourself, you should contact the department (see details at the end of this leaflet). If we are closed, you need to be seen by your GP or in A&E on the same day as you suspect you have an infection.

## Rehabilitation

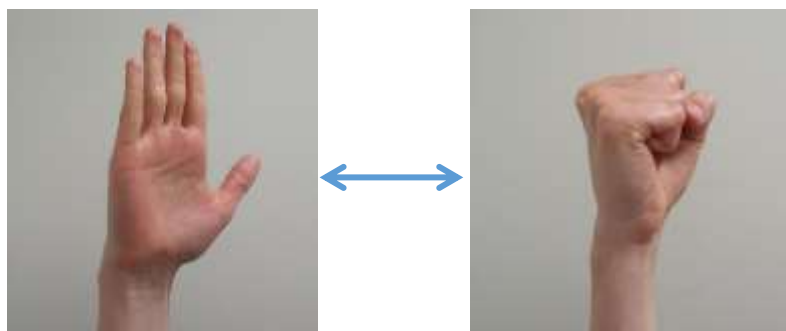
- **Your therapist will help you regain your movement and function.**
- Your therapist will guide you on the exercises you should complete. Some are listed below. **You must complete these exercises every 1-2 hours.**
- Discomfort with exercises and stretches, which may last up to 30 minutes afterwards is okay.
- Keep your wound dry until it is sealed.
- Massage your scar 3-4 times per day, once the wounds are fully healed. This can be done dry or with aqueous cream/massage oil.



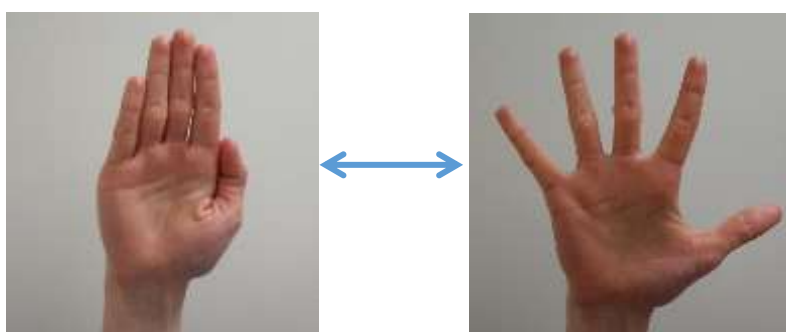
## Exercises

Aim to complete 10-15 repetitions, every 1-2 hours.

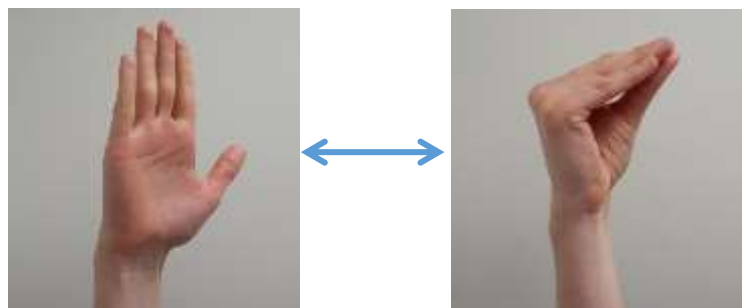
1. Bend and straighten your fingers.



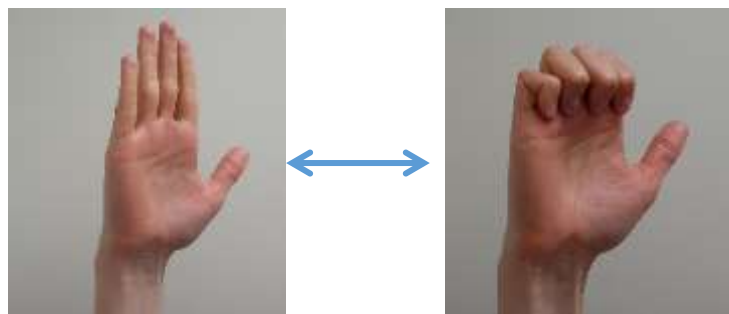
2. Spread your fingers apart and then squeeze them together again.



3. Squeeze your fingers together and bend at the knuckles, then straighten again.



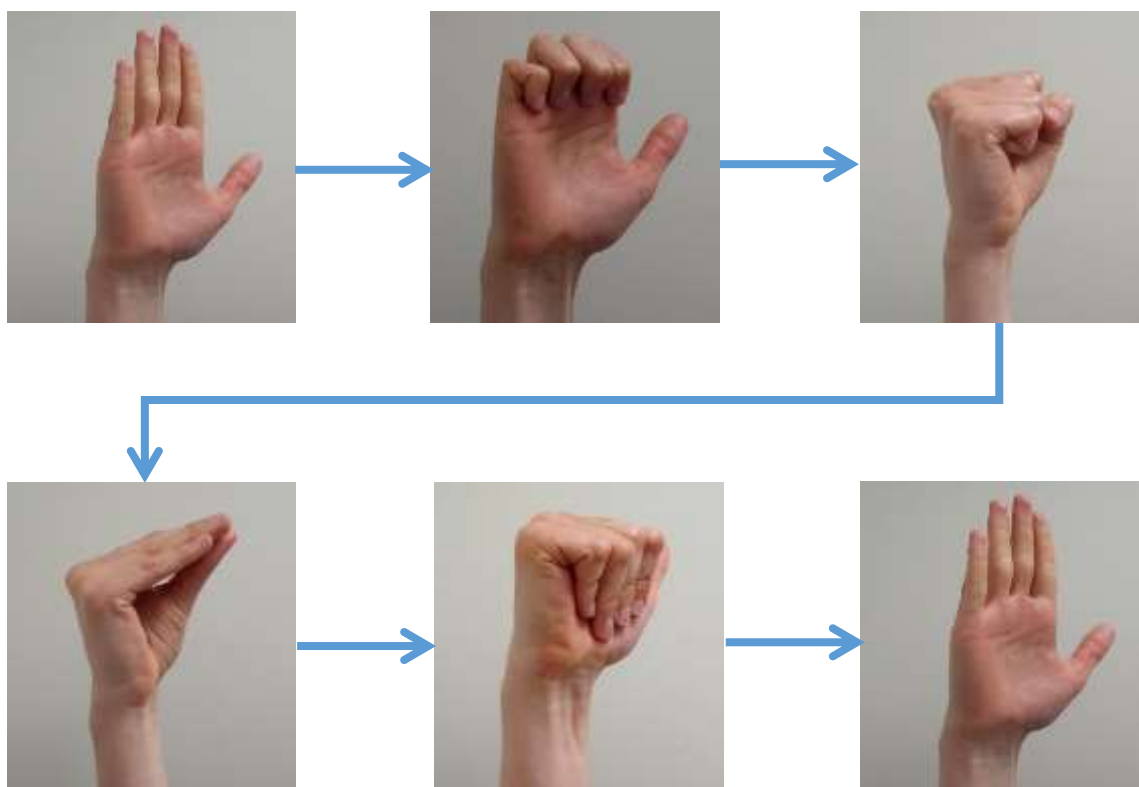
4. Gently curl your fingertips down towards the top of your palm and then straighten up as



5. Gently bend your fingers down, reaching towards the bottom of your palm, to form a 'flat fist'. Straighten up again.



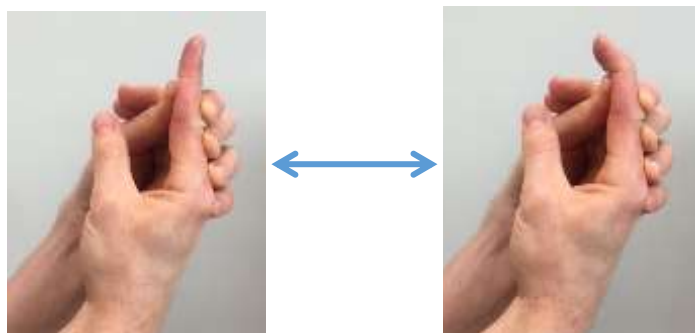
6. These exercises can be practiced in a combined exercise routine, as below.



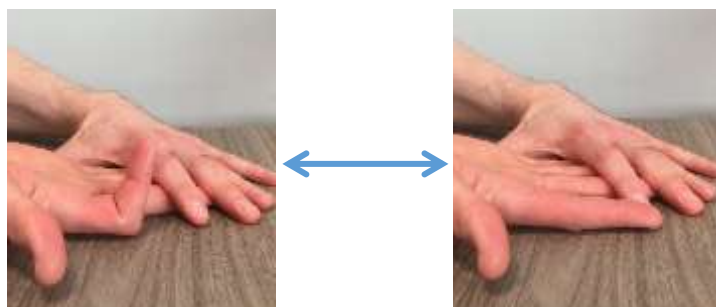
## Isolated Exercises

Aim to complete 10-15 repetitions, every 1-2 hours.

1. In this exercise, use your other hand to block the middle knuckle of the finger in a straight position. Keep the end joint free. Then, slowly bend the end joint down, hold for 2-3 seconds, then straighten back up.



2. Rest your hand on a table, with your palm facing up. Use your other hand to block the fingers you aren't exercising out straight, keeping the affected finger free to exercise. Then, slowly bend the middle joint up, hold for 2-3 seconds, then straighten back to the table.



### Stretches

These exercises may be uncomfortable, but you should be able to tolerate them for 3-5 minutes. Aim to hold these stretches for 3-5 minutes, every 1-2 hours.

1. To help with bending the fingers, using your hand push the fingers into a fist, putting pressure across the nails and over the back of the fingers.



2. Gently curl your fingertips down towards the top of your palm. Use your other hand to push your fingertips in until you feel a stretch.



3. Keep your fingers straight and bend at the first knuckles. Use your other hand to push down on top of the fingers, stretching the joint that is bent.



4. To help straighten the fingers, place your hand on a flat surface. Press down onto the back of the hand with your other hand, until you feel a stretch



## Rehab tips for your hand and wrist

- **Warm water exercises** - Once all wounds or pin sites have healed, submerge the affected hand/arm in warm water for 5 minutes and practise the exercises you have been taught.
- **Massage** - Rub into the affected area for 3-5mins, every 2-3 hours. If your wounds are healed, you can use moisturising cream. Massage will help decrease swelling, improve movement, soften scars and de-sensitise the area affected. Your therapist can guide you.
- If you have any open wounds or pin sites, monitor for signs of infection (redness, hot, swollen, burning pain, discharge from wound or feeling feverish). If you have any of these signs then visit your GP or A&E.

**If you have any problems, please contact your therapist. Contact details are below.**

### **Hand Therapy**

Brownsword Therapies Centre (Dept F1)  
Royal United Hospitals Bath NHS Foundation Trust  
Combe Park, Bath, BA1 3NG  
01225 821241 | [www.ruh.nhs.uk](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk)

Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital.

Email [ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net) or telephone 01225 825656.