This leaflet is designed for people who have been referred for surgery to treat Dupuytren’s Contracture. We hope it will provide you with a greater understanding of your operation and the care afterwards.

**What is Dupuytren’s Contracture?**

Dupuytren’s Contracture begins with the development of a painful lump or ‘nodule’ on the palm of the hand. Later cords of abnormal fibrous tissue form in the palmar fascia which lies beneath the skin of the palm and fingers. The function of the palmar fascia is to stop the skin from sliding around during grasping and gripping.

Fibres of palmar fascia run in all directions but the fibres that form cords run longways and it is these which shorten or contract, pulling the finger or fingers towards the palm. This contracture can make everyday activities difficult.

**What causes Dupuytren’s Contracture?**

The cause of Dupuytren’s Contracture is not fully understood. Family history can play a part and injury or an operation may trigger symptoms. Conditions linked to Dupuytren’s Contracture include diabetes, epilepsy and liver disease.
What will happen during my appointment?

You will be seen by a Hand Surgeon for a consultation initially. The Hand Surgeon will assess whether you are suitable for this specific surgery and will explain the procedure to you.

A second appointment date and time will be arranged for your surgery. At this appointment you will be required to sign a consent form so it is very important that you discuss the operation with your surgeon before you give consent to surgery. Please be aware that any surgery has a small risk of complications and success cannot be guaranteed. Unfortunately, it is not possible to cure Dupuytren’s only to control the contractures that it causes.

Where is surgery performed?

The consultation and surgery will take place at 58 Queen Square, Bristol, BS1 4LF. The operating theatre, which is fully equipped and air conditioned for procedures involving local and regional anaesthesia, also includes a patient waiting and changing area and a pre-operative and post-operative recovery room.

How is surgery performed?

Once a contracture interferes with function and movement, cutting open the skin of the palm and/or affected fingers and removing the abnormal tissue is the most effective treatment. This is called fasciectomy.

Cuts are made in a zigzag line across the palm. (Straight long scars can themselves become contracted.) The cuts may be deliberately left open to encourage postoperative stretching of the tissues. These will heal as well as a stitched wound.

Will it be painful afterwards?

It is normal to experience a degree of discomfort which can be managed by ‘over the counter’ pain relief.

What happens after the procedure?

After surgery your hand will be covered with a bandage, which you should keep dry until after any stitches are removed. Your hand will also be supported by a splint. Wearing a sling during the day to keep your hand above your heart will help to reduce swelling.

Dressings must be changed regularly in the two weeks after the operation. A smaller splint is fitted after this time which you should wear at night for up to six months.

Follow-up

Physiotherapy is extremely important after fasciectomy. An appointment with a hand physiotherapist will be arranged by the Community Hand Surgery Service for the day after your operation. You will need to arrange your next appointment with the physiotherapist and attend weekly for 2 to 3 months.

You will also be required to attend an appointment with your Hand Surgeon two weeks after the operation.
How long before I can return to work? How long before I can drive?

This depends largely on your occupation. However, generally speaking, a period of 3 to 4 weeks is the usual time required. You should not drive until you are able to make a firm fist.

Full recovery takes one or two months and hand strength gradually returns.

Possible Complications

You may experience stiffness in your hand and difficulty moving. It is not always possible for patients to straighten finger joints fully even after removal of all abnormal tissue. This is due to tight ligaments. As with any surgery, infection is a possible complication and dressings may be required for longer. In addition, because Dupuytren’s bands can wrap themselves around the nerves that provide sensation to the fingers, there may be some numbness in the fingers affected but this usually recovers with time.

Dupuytren’s Contracture may not be permanently curable. Recurrence is possible making further surgery necessary.

Who do I contact if I have any problems following my surgery?

If you have any problems within the first 2 weeks following your operation we advise you to contact Bristol Plastic Surgery on 0117 910 2400 for advice.

However, if any problems occur after this time then seek advice from your physiotherapist who may suggest you consult your GP. If necessary, your GP will then refer you back to the Community Hand Surgery Service.

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