

THUMB CMC JOINT REPLACEMENT REHABILITATION

Patient Information



Recovery and rehabilitation after surgery

Structured Rehab Program: THUMB CMC JOINT REPLACEMENT (MAIA)

Overview:

This program is designed for patients recovering from thumb CMC joint replacement surgery. It emphasises self-directed exercises and scar management to optimise recovery, restore function, and minimise complications. The speed of recovery varies from person to person and in some people recovery from this operation but for most the rehabilitation is rapid.

Phase 1: Protection & Early Mobility (Weeks 0-2)

- **Goals:**
 - Protect surgical site
 - Control swelling
 - Maintain mobility in non-immobilized joints
- **Precautions:**
 - You will be wearing a bulky bandage that leaves your fingers and the tip of your thumb free to move - keep it dry.
 - No forceful thumb use, gripping or lifting
 - Expect to see some bruising and swelling in the fingers or tracking down the wrist.
- **Self-Directed Exercises:**
 - **Shoulder, elbow, and finger movement:**
 - Shoulder circles, elbow bends, and gentle finger flexion/extension including the tip of the thumb.
 - 10 reps, 3-4 times daily
 - You can use your hand for gentle day to day activities within the confines of the bandage.
 - **Control of swelling:**
 - Elevate hand above heart
 - Gentle fist opening/closing
- **Pain control**
 - Take simple painkillers as and when needed (Paracetamol, Ibuprofen)
 - Most people have stopped taking pain killers after 2 weeks but for some people they still require some paracetamol. You should not need any strong painkillers by this point.

Phase 2: Gentle Mobilisation (Weeks 2-6) - See the hand exercises information sheet as well

- **Goals:**
 - Restore thumb and wrist mobility
 - Begin gentle strengthening
 - Initiate scar management
- **Precautions:**
 - Your bandage can come off, your suture can be removed and you will be given a removable splint to support the thumb which you then wean yourself off over the following 2-4 weeks. Remove the splint to do exercises and leave it off in between if comfort allows.

- Avoid heavy lifting, gripping or forceful pinching.
- **Self-Directed Exercises:**
 - **Thumb mobility:**
 - Thumb opposition (touch thumb to each fingertip)
 - Thumb abduction/adduction (move thumb away/toward palm)
 - Thumb flexion extension bending the tip down and up.
 - 10 reps, 3 times daily
 - **Wrist mobility:**
 - Gentle wrist flexion/extension and side-to-side movement
 - 10 reps, 3 times daily
 - **Light functional use:**
 - Picking up light objects (e.g., paper, coins)
 - Using a keyboard
 - Using cutlery
 - Return to driving at 4 weeks if you feel able to control the vehicle and would not hesitate in an emergency situation.
 - After 4 weeks start slowly increasing gripping pinching.
- **Scar Management: see also the scar management information sheet for more a detailed plan**
 - Once incision is healed, begin gentle scar massage (circular motions with unscented lotion or vitamin E oil, or silicone scar gel 2-3 times daily)
 - Use cold to help with swelling
 - Pinch the area of the scar to help separate tissues to help the skin become mobile

Phase 3: Strengthening & Functional Use (Weeks 6-12)

- **Goals:**
 - Improve strength and dexterity
 - Increase functional use of hand
- **Precautions:**
 - Gradually increase resistance; avoid pain
- **Self-Directed Exercises:**
 - **Strengthening:**
 - Isometric thumb pinch (press thumb against each finger, hold 5 seconds, repeat 10x)
 - Rubber band exercises (open fingers and thumb against resistance)
 - Therapy putty exercises (squeeze and pinch putty)
 - **Functional tasks:**
 - Buttoning, writing, opening jars (as tolerated)
- **Scar Management:**
 - Continue scar massage and silicone gel as needed
 - Protect scar from sun exposure
- Most people have returned to driving and light / moderate work by about 6 weeks, for those that perform heavier, gripping tasks it may take longer.

Phase 4: Advanced Strengthening & Return to Activity (Weeks 12+)

- **Goals:**
 - Return to full function
 - Prevent stiffness and maintain gains
- **Self-Directed Exercises:**
 - **Progressive strengthening:**
 - Increase resistance with putty, hand grippers, or light weights
 - Pinch and grip exercises with increasing difficulty
 - **Fine motor skills:**
 - Manipulate small objects (coins, buttons, beads)
- **Scar Management:**
 - Continue as needed for sensitivity or tightness

General Tips:

- Perform exercises 2-3 times daily unless otherwise instructed
- Stop any exercise that causes sharp pain or swelling
- Monitor for signs of infection (redness, heat, discharge) contact the hospital helpline without delay if you think you may have an infection please do not let anyone start antibiotics before speaking to us.

- Follow up with your healthcare provider or hand therapist as scheduled

Note:

This program is a general guideline. Always follow your surgeon or therapist's specific instructions and adapt exercises based on your comfort and progress.