DUPUYTREN'S CONTRACTURE SURGERY

Patient Information

MENDIP HAND CLINIC

Understanding Dupuytren's Contracture

Dupuytren's contracture is a condition that affects the connective tissue (fascia) in the palm of the hand. It causes the tissue to thicken and shorten, forming cords that can pull the fingers into a bent position. It is most common in the ring and little fingers, but can affect any finger.

Symptoms

The symptoms of Dupuytren's contracture typically develop slowly over time. They may include:

- **Small lumps or nodules** in the palm of the hand
- **Thickening of the skin** in the palm
- **Cords** forming under the skin of the palm and extending into the fingers
- **Difficulty straightening** the fingers
- **Inability to fully extend** the fingers
- **Decreased hand function**, making it difficult to grip objects or perform certain tasks

Diagnosis

Dupuytren's contracture is usually diagnosed through a physical examination. Your doctor will examine your hand and fingers, looking for the characteristic signs of the condition. They may also ask you about your symptoms and medical history.

No special tests are typically needed to diagnose Dupuytren's contracture.

Natural History

The progression of Dupuytren's contracture is highly variable. In some people, the condition progresses slowly and may not cause significant problems. In others, it can progress more rapidly, leading to significant functional impairment. It is not possible to predict how the condition will progress in any individual case.

Without treatment, Dupuytren's contracture can lead to permanent bending of the fingers, making it difficult to perform everyday tasks.

Surgical Treatments

Surgery is often recommended when Dupuytren's contracture significantly interferes with hand function. The goal of surgery is to release the contracted cords and restore finger extension. Common surgical options include:

- **Fasciectomy:** This involves surgically removing the thickened fascia in the palm and fingers. This is a more invasive procedure but can provide longer-lasting results.
- **Fasciotomy:** This involves dividing the contracted cords by making small incisions in the palm. This procedure can be performed using a needle or a small blade. It is less invasive than fasciectomy, but the cords may recur over time.
- **Needle Aponeurotomy:** This is a minimally invasive procedure where a needle is used to sever the cords. This can be performed in the office, and requires no incision.

Risks of Surgery

As with any surgical procedure, there are risks associated with Dupuytren's contracture surgery. These may include:

- **Infection:** Wound infection can occur after surgery.
- **Nerve injury:** Nerves in the hand can be damaged during surgery, leading to numbness or tingling in the fingers.
- **Blood vessel injury:** Blood vessels can be damaged during surgery, leading to bleeding or hematoma (blood clot) or in rare cases loss of the digit.
- **Stiffness:** Stiffness of the fingers can occur after surgery.
- **Recurrence:** The contracted cords can recur after surgery, requiring further treatment.
- **Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (CRPS):** This is a rare but serious complication that can cause chronic pain, swelling, and stiffness in the hand.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcome of Dupuytren's contracture surgery is to improve finger extension and hand function. Most people experience significant improvement after surgery. However, it is important to note that:

- **Full correction may not be possible:** In some cases, it may not be possible to fully straighten the fingers.
- **Recurrence is possible:** The contracted cords can recur over time, requiring further treatment.
- **Rehabilitation is important:** Hand therapy and exercises are important after surgery to regain strength and range of motion.

Next Steps

If you are considering surgery for Dupuytren's contracture, it is important to discuss your options with your doctor. They can help you weigh the risks and benefits of surgery and determine if it is the right treatment for you. Be sure to ask any questions you have about the procedure, recovery, and expected outcomes.