

Thumb Soft Tissue injury

Information for patients

You have sustained a soft tissue injury to your thumb. The soft tissues include ligaments, tendons and nerves.

Healing and using the splint:

Thumb soft tissue injuries can take up to 6-12 weeks to heal. You may have been provided with a thumb spica (see picture). It is recommended you start weaning out of your splint (if provided) as soon as possible and begin resuming normal activities in a graded manner as symptoms allow. Complete rest is **not** advisable as it is important for you to move your hand and fingers from the early stages of your injury to prevent stiffness. Try and participate in normal activities such as dressing, washing and eating but be cautious of gripping and lifting heavy objects as this may aggravate your symptoms in the early stages. It is advised you do not participate in sporting or heavy manual tasks for 6-12 weeks post injury depending on your symptoms, after which a graded return is recommended. It will take time for your previous level of exercise tolerance and confidence to return.



Pain, stiffness, swelling and bruising:

Pain, stiffness, swelling and bruising are very common and reflect your body's normal healing processes; which in turn tend to settle down as the weeks progress. Your symptoms will progressively improve but may continue for up to 3-6 months as you regain your normal activity levels. However, too much swelling causes problems such as pain and loss of thumb movement. Here are some suggestions to help you manage your symptoms:

- Elevate your hand above the level of your chest regularly and avoid hanging your arm by your side for prolonged periods
- If your thumb is swollen, stroking it in the direction from the tip of your thumb towards your hand can be helpful. This can be done several times a day.
- Try to rest your hand for the first 24-72 hours to allow the early stages of healing to begin after which, modify your activity within the limits of your symptoms. Complete rest is **not** advisable as it is important for you to move the thumb from the early stages of your injury to prevent stiffness. Try and participate in normal activities such as dressing, washing and eating but be cautious of gripping and lifting heavy objects as this may aggravate your symptoms in the early stages.
- A cold compress (see advice on Cold Packs below)

-
- Completing the exercise program below can also aid swelling reduction
 - It is important during your recovery that you take regular pain relief. Do not wait until your pain is severe before you start taking pain relief as it will not be as effective. If you need further advice please speak to your GP or pharmacist.

Please note, it can take many months for the swelling to settle in the thumb and may appear larger than it was prior to the injury. See [Initial Injury Advice](#) below.

Follow up:

We do not routinely follow up patients with this type of injury as they heal well on their own with time and appropriate self-management. Please seek further medical advice if:

- You are still experiencing pain and/or swelling after 6 weeks
- You are having difficulty moving your thumb and not close to achieving full range of movement after 6 weeks
- Or, you are experiencing pain or symptoms, other than at the site of the original injury or surrounding area

Initial Injury Advice:

Cold packs

A cold pack (ice or frozen peas wrapped in a damp towel) can provide short-term pain relief. Apply this to the sore area for up to 15 minutes, every few hours ensuring the ice is never in direct contact with the skin. Ice placed directly on the skin can cause skin damage/ice burns. If you have reduced sensation in your upper limbs or an open wound please do not use ice treatment.

Stop applying ice if you experience any negative effects such as:

- An increase in pain
- Increased swelling
- Increased skin soreness

Pacing

Rest is as important to recovery as exercise. Pace yourself by slowly increasing the activity you do with your affected hand. Start the exercises as indicated and build up to do a bit more each day as your symptoms allow. If you do not grade your return to your previous levels of activity you may aggravate your injury and prolong the rehabilitation period. Therefore, minimise aggravating factors and adapt activities to fit in with your symptoms. Do not force through pain. Please see our leaflet on [Pacing](#) for further information.

The numerical pain rating scale below may help guide your return to activities or progression of exercises.



If your pain is mild to moderate when doing the activity, after the activity and the next day then you can continue to progress. If severe to worst after the activity and/or the next day you may want to consider slightly reducing how much you are doing.

Pain Management

It is important during your recovery that you take regular pain relief to promote restoration of normal movement and sleep. Do not wait until your pain is severe before you start taking pain relief as it will not be as effective. If you need further advice please speak to your GP or pharmacist.

Nutrition

The healing process requires lots of energy and minerals from our diet and your body needs more than the normal daily calories to both function and heal. It is important to keep up a healthy, balanced diet with protein, fresh fruit and vegetables. The vitamins and nutrients provided will help towards your recovery.

Smoking & Alcohol

Healing tissue times are very well established to be impaired by nicotine found in tobacco and vapes. Finding a way to cut down your intake even marginally, even if for the first few weeks after injury will make for a quicker recovery.

For advice on smoking cessation and local support available, please refer to the following website One You Kent Smokefree www.oneyoukent.org.uk Tel: 0300 1231220 or discuss this with your GP.

Similarly, alcohol consumption above the recommended national guidance of 14 units of alcohol per week can impair healing directly and influence the ability of every major organ in the body to function normally, each one playing a vital role in healing.

Exercise Plan:

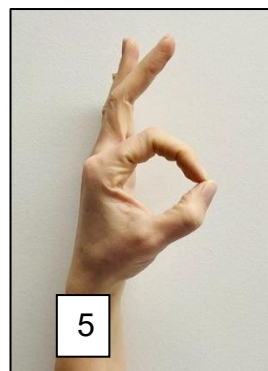
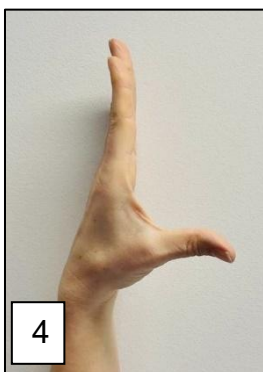
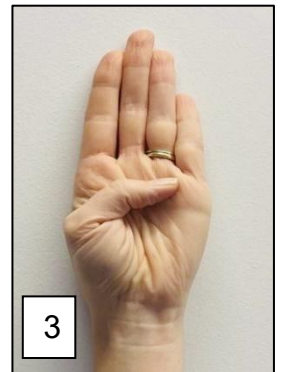
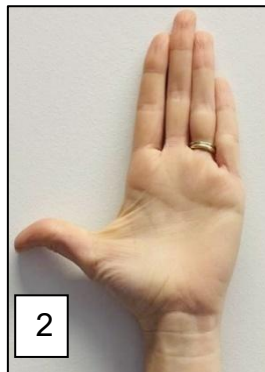
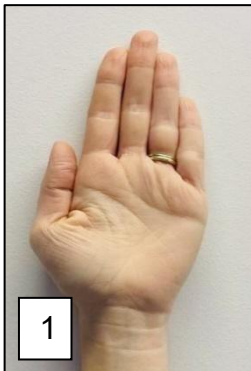
Follow the exercises below 3-4 times daily. It is normal to feel discomfort following exercise however, it is important you do not aggravate your symptoms. Exercise at your own pace and not through persistent pain. Please refer to the numerical pain score above for guidance, you should be aiming to be within the 'moderate' category.

You do not have to do all the exercises in one go try to select a few to carry out at different times of the day. Also, do not feel you have to copy the full movement of the exercise on your first go. The exercises are to be used as a guide only, over time build up gradually until you can achieve the full movement as shown below.

Thumb Range of Movement:

1. Tuck your thumb to the side of your palm
2. Straighten your thumb
3. Bring your thumb across your palm
4. Move your thumb forwards away from your palm to form an 'L' shape
5. Touch the tip of each finger with the tip of your thumb to look like an 'OK' sign then slide your thumb to the bottom of your little finger

Repeat the above sequence 5 times, as symptoms allow



Further information and advice can be obtained from:

List any appropriate support groups / telephone / web / email addresses.

NHS 111

 111

NHS Choices online

www.nhs.uk

The Trust operates a smoke free policy. This means that smoking is not permitted anywhere on hospital grounds. For Free NHS support to stop smoking please contact:

 **0300 123 1220**

MTW NHS Trust is committed to making its patient information accessible in a range of languages and formats. If you need this leaflet in another language or format please ask one of your clinical care team or the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). We will do our best to arrange this.

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust welcomes all forms of feedback from our service users. If the standard of service you have received from the Trust does not meet your expectations, we want to hear from you. Please speak with the ward manager or the nurse in charge in the first instance, or you can contact the **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** on:

Telephone:  01622 224960 or  01892 632953

Email: mtw-tr.palsoffice@nhs.net

or visit their office at either Maidstone or Tunbridge Wells Hospital between 9.00am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

You can be confident that your care will not be affected by highlighting any areas of concern or making a complaint. The Trust will retain a record of your contact, which is held separately to any medical records. If you are acting on behalf of a patient, we may need to obtain the patient's consent in order to protect patient confidentiality. More information on PALS or making a complaint can be found on the Trust's website: www.mtw.nhs.uk or pick up a leaflet from main reception.

Issue date: August 2025

Database reference: RWF-THE-PHY-LEA-PAT-154

Review date: August 2029

© MTW NHS Trust

Disclaimer: Printed copies of this document may not be the most recent version.

The master copy is held on Q-Pulse Document Management System

This copy – REV3.0
