

Dupuytren's Contracture

What is it?

Dupuytren's contracture is a disease that causes one or more fingers to be fixed in a bent position (1). It usually starts as a lump in the soft tissue of the hand under the skin. Over time (months to years), the lump forms a cord and contracts around the muscles, causing the finger to be bent.



Dupuytren's often affects both hands but one hand can be more affected than the other (2). People often find that they are unable to lie their hand flat on a table or surface. In severe cases, the ability to hold things may also be affected but most people find it is a problem but does not stop them from doing their normal activities.

Causes of Dupuytren's Contracture

No exact cause is known but it is more common in women when compared to men (3). Additionally, it tends to occur in middle age or older.

Some factors are also associated with Dupuytren's contracture such as (3):

- Having a family history of the condition
- Smoking
- Excessive Alcohol
- Diabetes or epilepsy

What are the treatment options available?

There is no cure for Dupuytren's contracture. Surgery can be done to straighten bent fingers but up to 40% of people develop a new contracture after surgery. Surgery is often not needed for people who are able to straighten their fingers (4).

There are different types of surgery and your surgeon will discuss with you which is the most suitable option for your condition (4):

1. Fasciotomy – the cord bending the finger is cut along the length of the finger and palm through a single incision to allow the finger to move freely.
2. Segmental fasciotomy – in this procedure, multiple small segments of the cord are removed through multiple incisions.
3. Regional fasciotomy – this involves removing the entire cord through a single incision.
4. Dermatofasciotomy – this is an extensive procedure where the cord is removed together with the overlying skin. The skin is then replaced with a skin graft taken from elsewhere in the body. This is reserved for very severe cases of Dupuytren's contracture or in younger patients with recurrent disease.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

How long will recovery from surgery take?

After surgery, you will be referred for hand therapy to help regain movement and function of the fingers. You might also be given a splint to wear for a few weeks.

The extent of recovery will vary according to the procedure and the extent of the disease prior to the operation.

When can I drive/return to work?

With regards to driving, you should only drive once your wound has fully healed and you can fully control the wheel and the car. This may take up to 6 to 7 weeks.

You can work once you feel your hand is ready for it, although this may vary according to your job. For desk-based jobs, you may be able to return to work after a few days but for heavy duties e.g. using machinery, lifting heavy objects, this may take up to 6 weeks before you can return to work.

References

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4. Dupuytren's disease | The British Society for Surgery of the Hand [Internet]. [cited 2022 Jul 21]. Available from: https://www.bssh.ac.uk/patients/conditions/25/dupuytren_s_disease