

Information for Patients

In some cases surgery to treat Dupuytren's Contracture is not necessary. This is because medical evidence tells us that in most cases, alternative treatments should be tried first and can be more effective.

About the condition

Dupuytren's contracture is a condition caused by fibrous cords which form in the palm of the hand and fingers. These draw the finger or fingers and sometimes the thumb into the palm and prevent them from straightening fully. Affected fingers will not straighten again without treatment and may gradually bend further and further into the palm. It is not usually a painful condition, but it does reduce hand function.

Treatment is recommended if the symptoms become troublesome. This is usually when the deformity prevents you from being able to put your hand flat on a table. However, if contractures are left to get too severe then treatment is less likely to be successful. If your fingers do start to contract, you should ask your GP to refer you to a hand surgeon who will be able to explain the benefits and risks of the possible treatments and what is likely to happen if you do nothing. This will allow the two of you to come to a shared decision as to which treatment, if any, is best for you.

What are the **BENEFITS** of the intervention?

The aim of treatment is to straighten the affected fingers and restore hand function and to prevent the contracted fingers from becoming so bent that they cannot be straightened with any treatment.

What are the **RISKS** of the intervention?

Open surgery to release the fibrous cords is done under anaesthetic. Incisions are made in the hand to remove the diseased tissue and straighten the fingers. This carries some risks including infection, numbness and finger stiffness. In about 1:3 cases, the condition recurs within five years.

What are the **ALTERNATIVES**?

There are two alternatives, the first involves cutting through the fibrous band with a needle to allow the finger to be straightened under a local anaesthetic. The second is to inject a drug into your contracted finger to dissolve part of the fibrous band. The finger is then pulled straight by your surgeon a few days later under local anaesthetic. Neither treatment is as effective in straightening the finger as open surgery and both have higher risks of recurrence. The risk of a major problem is much lower with needle treatment than surgery.

What if you do **NOTHING**?

Doing nothing is not likely to be harmful to your health, but the more the affected fingers bend into the palm, the less likely that any treatment can straighten them. Advanced hand contractures can significantly and permanently reduce hand function.

You can find out more about the [NHS Evidence Based Interventions](#) programme online.