

Syndactyly

This leaflet explains about syndactyly and its treatment. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact a doctor or nurse caring for your child.

Incomplete syndactyly



Complete syndactyly



What is syndactyly?

Syndactyly happens when fingers or toes fail to separate in the early stages of pregnancy. It is inherited in over four out of 10 cases (40%), and can occur on its own or as a part of a syndrome, for example, Poland's syndrome. It can develop on one hand or foot (unilateral) or on hands and/or feet (bilateral). Occasionally, both the hands and feet can be affected, however it is not common. The main issue associated with syndactyly is limited function caused by joined digits.

Treatment options

Surgical intervention under general anaesthetic is the only treatment option for syndactyly. Syndactyly may be simple – including webbing of soft tissue – or more complex – including fusion of bones and cartilages. It is only possible to operate on one side of a finger or toe at a time in order not to damage its blood supply. If multiple fingers or toes are affected on the same hand or foot, more than one operation may be required.

The aim of the surgery is to improve function of hands whereas correction of feet syndactyly is mainly cosmetic. Your surgeon will discuss this with you further so you can make an informed decision.

What happens before the operation?

You will meet the surgeon in our Outpatient Department and you will have the opportunity to ask further questions. You will be required to sign a consent form and attend a pre-operative assessment, where we will do

some tests to check your child's general health for the surgery. After your consultation, clinical photographs may be taken in the clinical photography department.

What happens during the operation?

The surgeon will release the fingers/toes from their webbing and create a new web space. This will be formed from flaps of skin from the sides of the digits. The surgeon will perform a series of zig zag incisions to create the flaps and cover the inner areas of the digits where they were previously joined up.

In most cases, the surgeon will need to use a skin graft. The skin for the graft is usually taken from the groin area, so scarring is not very visible where skin creases. The graft skin may be a different colour to the surrounding skin.

The operation lasts about three hours. The nurses will let you know when your child is in the recovery area, and take you there as soon as possible.

What are the risks associated with surgery?

The main risks associated with this surgical intervention are infection, bleeding and failure of a skin graft. Infection is usually minor and able to be treated with oral antibiotics.

Failure of the skin graft may affect the time the wounds take to heal, and subsequent scarring. If scarring is poor, then repeat surgery may be required when your child is older.

What happens after the operation?

Your child will return to one of our wards, usually Beach ward, postoperatively. If recovering well, they will be able to be discharged on the same day.

Your child's hand or foot will be covered with a large bandage to protect the skin graft. Please keep the bandage clean and dry until you see a nurse in a dressing clinic, approximately seven to 10 days after surgery.

If possible, try and keep the limb (leg or arm) elevated at home on some pillows to reduce any swelling and oozing. It is advisable to administer pain relief for a few days after the operation. Follow the instructions on the bottle for the correct dosage.

A few visits to a dressing clinic will be necessary, approximately once a week for four weeks.

Your child will be able to have a bath or shower when the wound is completely healed (this is usually within four to five weeks), your nurse will be able to advise you. While the hand is bandaged, a large rubber glove can be put over the site to keep the area protected during washing. Once healed completely, massaging and moisturising of the area will be necessary to soften the scar tissue. Your nurse will be able to advise on when to commence and what products to use.

You will receive an appointment for a consultant to review the progress after the operation, usually about six to eight weeks. Your child may need to be monitored on a regular basis as they grow to establish if further operations are required.

When you get home

If your child experiences any of the following, then please contact us on the numbers at the end of this leaflet:

- a temperature of more than 37.7°C
- any bleeding or oozing through the bandage
- a lot of pain, despite regular paracetamol
- a smell coming from the bandage
- the dressing fallings off or getting wet by accident.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your child, please contact the ward on 020 7188 8844 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

Or call the hospital switchboard, **t:** 020 7188 7188 and ask for the bleep desk. Ask for bleep 3040 and wait for a response. This will connect you to the clinical nurse specialist directly, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Out of hours, please bleep 0155 for the on-call plastic surgery doctor.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.evelinalondon.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

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