

Your child's surgery to remove extra fingers or toes (accessory digits)

This leaflet is about your child's surgery to remove extra little fingers or toes (accessory digits). It explains what you should do before your child's procedure, on the day of the procedure and when you return home.

Your child's condition and procedure

Why does my child need to have their extra fingers or toes removed?

If your child is born with extra little fingers or toes, they are called accessory digits. This is a common condition, especially in some ethnic groups, and is inherited in half of all cases.

The extra fingers or toes usually do not move. For this reason, they do not help your child. They can twist and become uncomfortable. Sometimes, the extra fingers or toes can become infected or swollen and painful. They may also bring unwanted attention when your child is older. Removing your child's extra fingers or toes is usually a small (minor) procedure and can prevent these complications.

The aim of the procedure is to remove the extra fingers or toes and close the skin. This should make it easier for your child to use their hands or feet and improve the appearance of their fingers or toes.

Are there any other treatment options to this procedure?

Extra fingers or toes with a fine base can be tied and allowed to fall off. However, we do not recommend this treatment because it can cause pain, bleeding or infection and leave an unsightly bump.

Before your child's procedure

What needs to happen before my child's procedure?

We need to see your child at a pre-admission clinic. This clinic may take place face to face or online. We make sure that your child is ready for an anaesthetic, which is a medicine to stop them feeling pain during the procedure, and surgery.

After the pre-admission clinic, our admissions team contacts you by letter, text message or phone. We offer you a date for your child's procedure.

Your child should not eat for 6 hours before the procedure. They can drink water until they arrive at the Evelina London children's day surgery unit. We give you more guidance about this (fasting instructions).

Do I need to get pain medicine ready for my child?

Please make sure that you have a week's supply of paracetamol (a painkiller) and ibuprofen (an anti-inflammatory medicine) at home before the procedure. We do not routinely give these medicines to take home for your child after day surgery.

You can buy paracetamol and ibuprofen from a pharmacy, supermarket or shop. Paracetamol for children may also be called Calpol®. Ibuprofen for children may also be called Calprofen® or Nurofen®. You need the type of medicine that you would give your child if they were unwell with a cold or ear ache. If your child cannot take paracetamol or ibuprofen for any reason, please speak to their healthcare team about other options.

On the day of the procedure

When you arrive at the children's day surgery unit

We give you a time to arrive at the Evelina London children's day surgery unit. It is important that you arrive at the correct time and have followed the fasting instructions for your child. If you arrive late or have not followed the fasting instructions, we may not be able to do the procedure.

You and your child meet the surgical and anaesthetic teams on the admissions ward before the procedure. We confirm that you have given your permission (consent) for the procedure. You can ask us any questions that you may have.

During the procedure

Your child may have a local or general anaesthetic medicine depending on their age.

- If your child is up to 6 months old, we usually give them a local anaesthetic. The medicine makes the area being treated numb, but your child stays awake for the procedure. This is the safest way for us to do the surgery. You can stay with your child during the procedure.
- If your child is over 12 months old, we usually give them a general anaesthetic. The medicine makes your child sleep during the procedure and stops them feeling any pain. At this age, they are likely to be lively and unable to stay still during the procedure. You can stay with your child until they are asleep. Please see our separate leaflet called "Your child's general anaesthetic" for details.

We do not usually carry out the procedure between the ages of 6 and 12 months.

When the anaesthetic medicine starts to work, the surgeon removes the extra fingers or toes. They close the wound with stitches and put on a small dressing. Sometimes, the surgeon uses skin glue over the stitches. Within 1 to 2 weeks, the stitches start to dissolve. Any skin glue peels off by itself.

The surgery takes about 20 minutes for each extra finger or toe that we need to remove.

Are there any risks to my child's procedure?

Every procedure has some risks of complications. To reduce these risks, we make sure that your child is well at the time of the procedure. We talk to you about the risks in the clinic and before the procedure when we confirm that we have your consent.

The safest way to do this procedure is under a local anaesthetic. If possible, we recommend that your child has the procedure when they are under 3 or 4 months old. They can then cope with it better.

The specific risks of surgery to remove extra fingers or toes are:

- bleeding and a small amount of liquid coming from the wound (oozing)
- an infection that needs to be treated with antibiotics
- a small scar where we remove the extra finger or toe
- a lumpy scar
- a nerve lump or growth of nerve tissue called a neuroma (this is rare)

After your child's procedure

How will my child look and feel after their procedure?

Your child may feel drowsy after their surgery and sleep for a while. They may be restless (agitated) and upset for up to an hour after waking up from the procedure. Some children may have pain and feel or be sick (vomit), but this is not common.

During the procedure, we may give your child painkillers, fluids, anti-sickness medicines and a local anaesthetic. The local anaesthetic is medicine to make the area around the wound numb.

After the procedure, your child has a light dressing covering the area that has been treated on their hand or foot.

Will my child be in pain after their procedure?

Your child usually has a local anaesthetic medicine during their procedure. This medicine gives them pain relief for several hours after they wake up.

When your child is awake, we may give them paracetamol. This depends on their age and if they are uncomfortable after the procedure.

When can my child eat and drink or feed after their procedure?

Your child should be able to eat and drink or feed as usual within 1 to 2 hours of the procedure.

Do we see the surgeon after my child's procedure?

Yes, the surgeon comes to check your child after their procedure. They update you about the surgery and answer any questions that you may have.

When can my child go home?

Your child can go home on the same day as their procedure when they:

- feel comfortable
- can manage (tolerate) their usual food and drink
- are not feeling sick (nausea) or being sick (vomiting)
- are behaving as they usually do

Please supervise your child carefully on the journey home. According to the sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) guidelines, it is best to avoid long car journeys for babies under 1 year of age. If you travel home by car, it is important that:

- you stop for frequent breaks to feed your baby and change their position
- an adult sits with the baby in the back of the car

After you go home

How do I care for my child's wound after their procedure?

After the procedure, the surgeon or a member of their team gives you specific instructions about your child's wound and dressings. They explain how to look after your child's wound while it heals and what follow-up care you can expect.

Your child has a light dressing over their wound and sometimes skin glue. They need to wear the dressing for 1 week. We then see them in the clinic for a wound check. Otherwise, you may have a phone appointment after 1 week and we look at photos of how the wound is healing.

To prevent infection, it is important to keep the dressing clean and dry until we do a wound check. If the dressing gets wet, please remove it and put on a sticking plaster until we review your child.

After your child's wound check, the area does not usually need to be covered. Your child can then have baths as usual again. Their stitches start to dissolve within 1 to 2 weeks and do not need to be removed. Any skin glue peels off by itself.

The wound usually heals within about 2 weeks. After 1 month, you can start moisturising and gently massaging the scar area with non-perfumed (unscented) products at least once a day.

You also need to take extra care to protect your child's skin from the sun. For at least 1 year after the procedure, try to avoid exposing the scar to the sun. You need to put a strong sunscreen on your child when they go outside. The label of the sunscreen should have:

- a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 50 to protect against UVB
- at least 4-star UVA protection

UVB and UVA are types of ultraviolet rays from the sun that can damage the skin.

How can I manage my child's pain after their procedure?

If your child is over 2 months old and appears to be in any pain at home, we recommend giving them paracetamol. Please remember to buy this pain medicine before the day of your child's procedure. It is also important to make sure that your child drinks plenty of fluids.

Do not give paracetamol to babies under 2 months old, unless a doctor has prescribed this. Children can take paracetamol as a syrup from the age of 2 months.

Always follow the instructions on the bottle for the correct amount (dose) of paracetamol. If your child is small for their age, please check with a doctor or pharmacist. A lower dose may be more suitable.

Most children only need 1 recommended dose of paracetamol on the evening of their procedure. This is provided that our nurses have not already given your child paracetamol before you go home. However, if needed, you can give your child:

- 1 recommended dose of paracetamol every 4 to 6 hours and no more than 2 doses in 24 hours, if they are 2 to 3 months old
- 1 recommended dose of paracetamol every 4 to 6 hours and no more than 4 doses in 24 hours, if they are over 3 months old

Do I need to look for any symptoms after my child's procedure?

Contact a GP or the plastic surgery team if you feel that your child is unwell, or you notice:

- bleeding through the dressing
- signs of infection, such as pain, severe swelling, hardening or thickening of the skin, redness that spreads on the skin, a bad smell from the wound and leaking yellow-green liquid called pus or watery fluid
- a high temperature (fever)
- your child does not settle after having pain medicine and is in discomfort
- your child is not eating or drinking well

On white skin, the area around the wound can appear red if it is infected. On brown or black skin, the area can appear red or purple but it may be more difficult to notice the redness. An infected wound site may feel warm or hot to touch on any skin colour.

If you are very concerned or notice these symptoms outside working hours (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm), call 999 or go to A&E.

Do you see my child again after their procedure?

Yes, your child has a follow-up appointment face to face in the clinic or by phone. We may give you a date for the follow-up appointment while you are still in the children's day surgery unit. It is most likely that you will get a phone call from our team in the next few days.

Contact us

If you **cannot keep your appointment**, contact our admissions team, **phone** 020 7188 9098, **email** gst-tr.paediatricadmissions@nhs.net

If your child has a **cough, cold or high temperature** in the 2 weeks before the procedure, contact our pre-assessment team, **phone** 020 7188 7188 extension 58209

If you have any **concerns during working hours (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm)** about your child's surgery, call the paediatric plastic surgery clinical nurse specialist, **phone** 07747 204 489

If you have any **concerns outside working hours (Monday to Friday, 5pm to 9am or at the weekend)** about your child's surgery, contact the on-call plastic surgery doctor through the main switchboard, **phone** 020 7188 7188 and ask for bleep 0155

If you have any **concerns from 24 hours after surgery** about your child's health, contact your child's specialist surgical team or GP surgery, or **phone** NHS 111

If you are concerned that your child is **seriously unwell** at any time, go to your nearest A&E or **phone** 999



Leaflet number: 5408/VER1

Date published: June 2023

Review date: June 2026

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A list of sources is available on request