

## Patient information

### **Release of the Ulnar Nerve at the Elbow**

You will be admitted for surgery to your elbow because of an irritation of the ulnar nerve. The ulnar nerve is one of the main nerves to the hand innervating the little finger side of the hand and a number of muscles responsible for moving the fingers. The nerve is at the elbow lying very superficially at the “funny bone”. The nerve may become irritated as a result of repetitive trauma, strains or a fracture in which case surgical release is required.

The patient often complains of numbness of the little and possibly ring finger and perhaps a weakness of mainly the muscles on the little finger side of the hand.

#### **Surgical Treatment**

Surgery is performed in a general anaesthetic or occasionally in a local anaesthetic. Normally a tourniquet is applied to the arm to shut down the blood supply during the operation. The operation normally takes less than thirty minutes, but the tourniquet may be uncomfortable if a local anaesthetic is used.

At surgery an incision is made over the ulnar nerve over the inner aspect of the elbow. The nerve is identified and freed of any soft tissue compression.

Following this the wound is closed with a nylon suture and a padded dressing is applied over the wound.

#### **Post Operative Regime**

Following surgery the arm is normally rested in a sling for your comfort. You may take the arm out of the sling and perform general activities of daily living and perform exercises. You should not perform any heavy lifts with the arm for 4-6 weeks.

You should have the suture removed within approximately two weeks of the operation, either at your local surgery or at the hospital.

You may return to driving once your elbow is comfortable. You may also have a bath or shower when the wound is dry.

## **Return to work**

This will depend on your situation and commitments. You should discuss this with your surgeon.

## **Complications**

**Pain:** A certain amount of pain is expected following surgery. You should take the painkillers as prescribed by your surgeon. You may also place a bag of ice cubes or frozen peas over the elbow to ease discomfort. If further pain is experienced please contact your General Practitioner or the surgical department.

**Wound leakage:** A certain amount of bleeding may be seen following surgery for the first 2-3 days. Gentle pressure applied to the dressing will normally result in stopping the bleeding but if this should not be the case please contact your General Practitioner or the surgical department.

**Infection:** Infections following elbow surgery are rare. If you should experience swelling, redness, throbbing pain or leakage of pus and/or high temperature in association with elbow pain you should contact your General Practitioner or the surgical department.

**Nerve Irritation:** As a result of surgery to the tissue around the nerve you may find that the numbness and tingling of the ulnar nerve has increased immediately following surgery. This is expected to settle down within six weeks after surgery. If significant scarring has been found at surgery damage to the nerve may occur while releasing it. It is rare that the nerve is permanently damaged but this may on very rare occurrences happen. In that case permanent numbness of the little and ring finger will occur and some impairment of the hand function will likewise occur. If the nerve, prior to surgery, was very irritated by scar tissue significant improvement may not be seen after surgery.

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