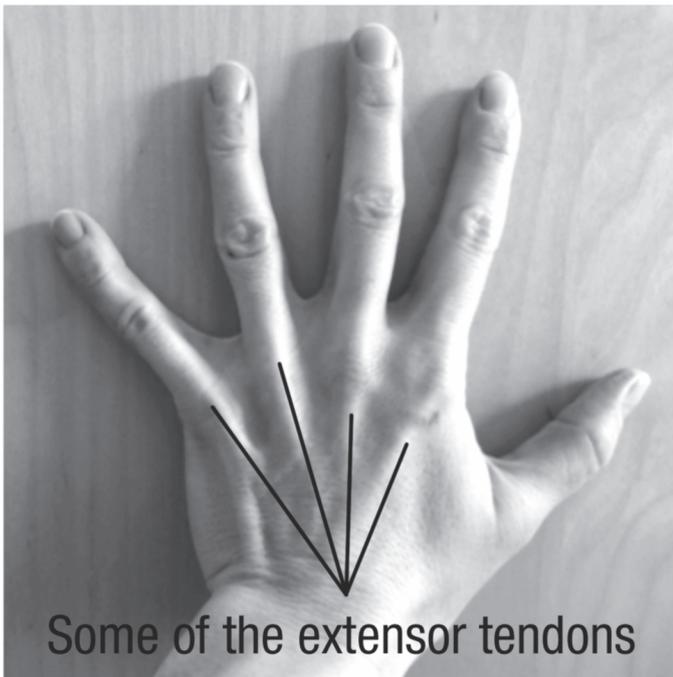




CONDITION

What are Tendon Injuries?

Many things can injure or damage tendons but this page focuses on cuts to tendons.



Some of the extensor tendons

Extensor tendons visible on the back of the hand

What do tendons do?

Tendons connect muscles to bones. When the muscle contracts (tightens) the tendon pulls on the attached bone and makes it move at the joints.

What tendons are there in the hand?

Movements of the hand are complex and require fine control. There are many tendons and muscles connected to the hand bones which co-ordinate hand movements.

Bending the fingers and thumb into the palm (flexion) is mainly controlled by 2 long tendons for each finger attached to muscles in the forearm. These are hard to see through the skin but you can notice them gliding backwards and forwards in the forearm when the fingers are moved.

Straightening out the fingers (extension) is mainly controlled by 1 or 2 tendons for each finger, again with the muscles in the forearm. You can see many of these quite clearly on the back of your hand (see picture).

How can tendons be injured?

By far the commonest way of injuring tendons in the hand is with a cut on a knife or glass. It is possible to rupture tendons or pull them off where they attach to the bone but this is more unusual.

How do we know a tendon has been injured?

Frequently this is very obvious if the finger is not moving as normal or is resting in an abnormal position compared to the rest of the hand. Sometimes the problem can be more subtle. A careful examination by your clinician is the key.

Are other investigations required?

Further investigations are not usually required but xrays are commonly obtained to exclude a co-existing bone injury or any retained foreign body in a wound.

What is the treatment for injured tendons?

Cut or ruptured tendons need to be carefully repaired with an operation as soon as possible (within a few days). Crucially, following the operation, a carefully graded set of exercises needs to be undertaken to regain movement without over stretching the repair. The exercises are specific to exactly which tendons have been damaged and where in the hand the injury occurred. Hand therapists are expert in this field and help patients through this process. On average you will need help with splints and exercises for 6 to 12 weeks after a tendon repair – tendons take a long time to heal.

What function can I expect after a tendon repair?

This relates to many factors including your age, how much damage occurred at the time of the injury, how the repair was done and how closely you comply with the rehabilitation instructions from the hand therapist.