King's College Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust

PIP Joint Replacement

Information for patients before surgery

This leaflet explains what a PIP Joint Replacement is and what to expect from surgery. If you have any queries or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to the therapist caring for you.

What is a PIP (proximal interphalangeal)?

PIP (proximal interphalangeal) is the middle joint of the finger. It can become painful, deformed or stiff by several reasons such as arthrtiis, after injury or inflammatory joint disease.

What to expect from surgery?

Published evidence and local outcome data both suggest that pain relief is often more reliable outcome than major improvement in finger movement.

Some people gain motion, some stay similar, and some have less movement than before surgery, particularly in more complex, revision, inflammatory, or unstable cases.

Surgery may also improve sideways drift or deformity, but if the finger is already deviated or unstable before surgery, some residual deviation or instability may remain afterwards. Your surgeon and hand therapist will discuss what outcome is most realistic for your finger.

Benefits

Your proposed surgery to replace it with a new joint is aimed to reduce pain, retain/increase the movements and improve the appearance of finger so that you can use your hand better.

Risks

It is unlikely that your finger joint will return to normal. In some patients, the movements may become less after the operation.

Recovery and rehabilitation

Recovery after PIP joint replacement is gradual and may continue for several months. Hand therapy is an important part of the recovery process and usually starts within a week after surgery. Therapy may include wound review, swelling management, scar care, exercises, splint adjustment, and advice about how quickly to progress hand use.

After your operation

You will leave hospital after the operation with your operated hand in a bandage/splint and arm in a sling. You will be advised to move your fingers as comfortable. From second day after operation, if you are able to, you can use your operated hand for light work such as using the key board, mobile phone or holding a cup of tea. Depending upon your pain, you may or may not be able to do it. You should not let the operated hand get wet.

Soon after your operation, normally within a week, you will be seen by hand therapist in Kings College Hospital, Denmark Hill, London. The hand therapist may remove the dressing/splint, dress the wound, remove the stitches and may make a new splint for you.

Splinting and hand therapy

After surgery, splinting is used to protect the joint, maintain alignment, and reduce the risk of deformity. Your splint may be changed during recovery depending on swelling, alignment, movement, and stability.

Your hand therapist may also advise a slower or more protective programme if there is concern about instability, residual deviation, revision surgery, or soft tissue balance.

Typical recovery timeline

0 to 2 weeks	Wound healing, swelling management, protective splinting and gentle exercises.
2 to 6 weeks	Gentle exercises begin under therapist guidance with splinting
6 to 12 weeks	Increasing functional hand use and adjustment of splinting or exercise programme.
3 to 6 months	Ongoing recovery, strengthening of function, and review of progress.

Your role in recovery

Your input makes a major difference to outcome. To give yourself the best chance of a good result:

- Attend hand therapy appointments.
- Wear splints exactly as advised.
- Complete exercises regularly and avoid overdoing activities too early.

Common problems or limitations of this operation may be:

- Stiffness or limited movement after surgery.
- Swelling and scar sensitivity in the early stages.
- Residual or recurrent finger deviation.
- Instability, especially if this was already present before surgery.
- Ongoing pain, stiffness, or the need for prolonged therapy.
- Implant problems in some cases.

Important points to remember

PIP joint replacements can be helpful, but realistic expectations are important. For many patients, the best result is a finger that is less painful, better alignment, and more functional rather than one that moves normally.

Contact details

Hand Therapy: 020 3299 8220 Orthopaedics: 020 3299 1919

MyChart

Our MyChart app and website lets you securely access parts of your health record with us, giving you more control over your care. To sign up or for help, call us on 020 3299 4618 or email **kings.mychart@nhs.net**. Visit **www.kch.nhs.uk/mychart** to find out more.

PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

Tel: **020 3299 4618** Email: **kings.pals@nhs.net**

If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Interpreting and Accessible Communication Support on 020 3299 4618 or email kings.access@nhs.net

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