

Reducing swelling in the hand

Swelling is a normal reaction of the tissues after a hand injury or operation. Fluid accumulates in the intercellular space, which can be seen in the swollen area as tissue expansion. Swollen area may throb and feel tight. Swelling may complicate finger movements and cause stiffness in the joints. Swelling slows down tissue and wound healing, and increases pain.

An elevated hand position and exercises help in controlling swelling and promote blood circulation. Exercises maintain the mobility of free joints. Additionally, cold therapy (cold packs and cold gel packs) decreases swelling and pain. Cold packs can be used several times a day for periods of circa 20 minutes.

After the swelling has reduced, keep the hand relaxed next to your body while moving. Use your hand in light (less than 1 kg) daily activities, such as eating, dressing etc.

Keep your hand above the heart level as much as possible at least for the first week until the swelling has clearly reduced.



Support the hand in an elevated position with pillows while lying down.



Begin exercises immediately / after the anesthesia has worn off / on the day after the operation. Do the exercises standing or sitting. Start exercises by breathing in and out at your own pace. Do the exercises calmly and efficiently. Do the exercises every 1-2 hours with 10 reps/exercise. Continue exercising until the swelling has reduced.

- 1. Bend the elbow joint and raise the arm straight up.
- Keep fingers relaxed.



- 2. Stretch out and bend the elbow joint.
- Keep fingers relaxed.



- 3. Stretch out and flex fingers while keeping the hand in elevated position.
- Note that the fingers bend from the knuckles, if the cast/bandage allows it.



When necessary, contact your occupational therapist.