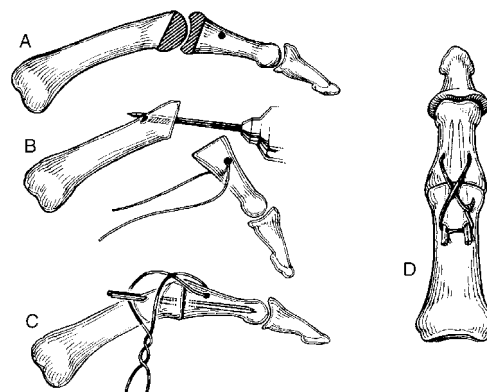


## FINGER FUSION

The joint(s) in your finger(s) have been fused. This means that a finger joint has been removed and the bone-ends have been joined together (fusion). There are many ways of joining the bones but they are usually held in the best position by a number of metal wires.

**Internal wires** Wires may be left buried under the skin. These are usually left inside permanently but occasionally need to be removed at a later date by a small operation if they become a nuisance.

**External wires** Often at least one wire is left sticking out of the skin. This is removed by the doctor about 4 weeks after the operation when the bones have begun to join. Patients are always anxious about this but removal of a wire is simple and virtually painless.



Soon after the operation, the dressing will be removed and you will be provided with your splint. The fusion will be kept protected from knocks and stresses by a splint until X-Rays show that the bone-ends are joining together. This usually takes about 6 weeks. The fusion will not be really "solid" and ready for heavy jobs until 12 weeks.

Hand elevation is important to prevent swelling and stiffness of the fingers. Please remember not to walk with your hand dangling, or to sit with your hand held in your lap. It is fine, however, to lower your hand for light use. It is important to move the rest of your hand joints through their full range (including the others on the same finger) to prevent stiffness. So, remove your splint at least every 2 hours to allow finger movement. Movement ("active motion") alone will do no harm to the fixation but until it has healed the operated finger(s) must not be **forcibly bent** ("passive motion") or **strained** by heavy picking up, pushing, pulling, gripping etc.

There obviously will be some swelling and bruising. Look out for any redness or tenderness in the area around the wound that might indicate an infection. Do not apply antiseptic but please contact my secretary if you have any worries. Once dressings are removed, it is safe to get the hand wet in a bath or shower. The wound and the surrounding skin can become dry and if this occurs, briefly immerse the whole hand in water to which a small quantity of baby-oil has been added. Moisturisers (e.g. E45, Diprobase creams) can be used on the hand but avoid rubbing them directly into the wound at this stage.

Your stitches will be removed about 2 weeks after the operation. The area will be swollen and tender for many weeks after the operation. This can be helped by massaging the area firmly with the moisturizing cream.

Timing of your return to work is variable according to your progress, occupation and you should discuss this.

**Infection** This is indicated by the appearance of redness around the wound or the exposed wires. This must be reported to a doctor quickly and will be treated with antibiotics. If it does not settle, it may be necessary to remove the fixation.

**Non-union** The bones can fail to join for many reasons such as too much movement or infection. It may be necessary to redo the operation if this occurs.

**Mal-union** The bones can fail to join at the best angle if the fusion is damaged or becomes infected. It may be necessary to redo the operation if this occurs.