

WRIST ARTHROSCOPY

Arthroscopy involves placing a small telescope into the wrist joint(s). The telescope is inserted into at least two areas on the back of the wrist. The view is projected onto a television screen. This allows me to inspect all the joint surfaces and the wrist ligaments.

Usually the procedure is purely for diagnosis. Sometimes it can be combined with the removal of loose fragments or trimming of cartilage tears. I will not proceed to an “open” operation unless this has previously been discussed with you.

The operation is performed under general anaesthetic but you can usually be discharged on the day of surgery. It is usual to be able to return to your normal activities within days of the operation unless additional procedures have been performed.

Scar You will have 2-3 small scars on the back of the wrist. These will be somewhat firm to touch and tender for 6-8 weeks. This can be helped by massaging the area firmly with the moisturizing cream.

Symptoms Arthroscopy often “stirs up” your wrist symptoms for some weeks.

Nerve damage Nerves running in the region (see diagram) can be damaged during the surgery. This would cause the formation of a painful spot in the scar (neuroma) or a small area of loss of sensitivity on the dorsum of the hand. This complication is rare (4%) but may require a further operation to correct.

Infection Superficial infection (3%) can occur after any operation and would be treated with antibiotics. Deeper infection, involving the joint is very rare.

Tendon damage The tendons running to the fingers (see diagram) can be damaged or cut. This is very rare (1%) but would require further surgery to correct.

Stiffness About 5% of people are sensitive to hand surgery and their hand may become swollen, painful and stiff after any operation (algodystrophy). This problem cannot be predicted but will be watched for afterwards and treated with physiotherapy.

