



What is a Dupuytren's Disease?

Dupuytren's disease is an abnormal thickening of the tissue lying beneath the skin of the palm, known as the palmar fascia. It can produce lumps known as nodules, and cords running into the fingers. These cords may cause the fingers to bend in towards the palm. This is known as Dupuytren's contracture. The skin may be affected, but the deeper structures such as the tendons are not involved. Less commonly it may occur in other locations such as the back of the finger joints (knuckle pads), or in the sole of the foot. It is usually a slowly progressive condition, often developing over several years.



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What causes Dupuytren's Disease?

Dupuytren's disease is thought to be an inherited condition. The pattern of inheritance is complex however, and many patients do not have a family history they are aware of. The condition is more common in men over 40, and in people of northern European descent.

How is it diagnosed?

Dupuytren's disease usually has characteristic appearance, and the diagnosis can be made on history and clinical examination. Nodules are generally firm and may be adherent to the overlying skin. Changes in the contour of the skin known as pits may develop. Cords may develop, extending from the palm into the fingers, and may cause a contracture of the finger, where the finger adopts a bent posture that cannot be corrected. The ring and little fingers are most commonly affected. Most patients do not require special investigations, but sometimes your doctor may recommend an Xray and Ultrasound.

How is it treated?

In mild cases where hand function is not affected observation only is recommended. As the disease progresses contractures of the fingers may develop and this can affect hand function. Options for treatment in our practice include collagenase injections and surgery. Collagenase injection is a technique where a small amount of medicine is injected into the Dupuytren's cord, weakening it. The finger can then be manipulated to make it straighter. With surgery the Dupuytren's tissue is removed allowing the finger to be straightened. With severe contractures it may not be possible to completely correct the position of the finger. Skin grafts are sometimes required in more severe cases. Your surgeon will recommend the most suitable treatment for you depending on your pattern of disease.

After surgery your hand will be in post-operative dressings for 1-2 weeks. You then commence range of movement exercises and night splinting, supervised by Hand Therapy. Overall recovery is approximately 3 months. Over time, Dupuytren's disease may recur, and sometimes further treatment is required.