

This guide explains what to expect after your trigger thumb release with Dr Mark Robinson — from leaving hospital, to caring for your hand at home, to the exercises that will help you get back to your usual activities. Please keep it handy and bring it to your appointments.

Everyone recovers at their own pace. Your surgeon and hand therapist will tailor the timeframes to your surgery and your progress.

ABOUT YOUR SURGERY

The tendons that bend your fingers and thumb run along the palm side of each finger, through a tunnel of tough bands called **pulleys**. These keep the tendon close to the bone as it moves.

In **trigger thumb**, the first pulley at the base of the finger becomes thickened and tight, and the tendon can develop a small swelling. The tendon then catches as it slides through. This causes pain at the base of the thumb and/or clicking, catching & locking of the finger in a bent position.

In a **trigger thumb release**, the tight pulley is divided through a small incision at the base of the thumb, so the tendon can glide freely again. The catching usually stops straight away. Some swelling, stiffness and tenderness around the scar is common for a few weeks. If your thumb had been locked or bent for a long time, it may take longer to fully recover, and your exercises (and hand therapy, if needed) will help.

BEFORE YOUR SURGERY

Diet / Vitamin C

In the weeks before and after your operation, Dr Robinson encourages you to eat a healthy, balanced diet rich in protein, vitamins and minerals. Include plenty of lean meat, fish, eggs, dairy, legumes, wholegrains, fruit and vegetables, and keep well hydrated.

Dr Robinson recommends taking 1000–1500 mg of vitamin C daily, starting 2 days before your surgery and continuing for 6 weeks afterwards. Vitamin C supports the body's natural healing processes, including the repair of bone, skin and soft tissue. Vitamin C supplements are available from your local pharmacy or supermarket.

No Smoking

Smoking significantly slows healing and increases the risk of complications, including wound infection, delayed bone healing and problems with anaesthesia. We strongly recommend that you stop smoking before your surgery and avoid smoking throughout your recovery. This includes cigarettes, vapes and other nicotine products. If you would like support to quit, speak with your GP or contact Quitline on 13 78 48.

GOING HOME

Discharge

You will go home on the day of surgery.

Wound, Dressings & Showering

You can remove the bandage the day after your operation. Leave the adhesive dressings in place until your 2–3 week review, when we will remove them. The dressings are water resistant, not waterproof, so showering is fine but please try to keep them mostly dry until your post-op appointment. There are no stitches to be removed.

Swelling / Ice / Elevation

- To help reduce swelling, keep your hand raised for the first 24–48 hours, including while you sleep (for example, resting on a pillow higher than your elbow). Moving your fingers regularly also helps.
- Apply ice wrapped in a cloth 3–5 times a day, for 20 minutes at a time.

Pain Relief & Medications

In general, take **paracetamol** regularly for the first 24 hours, followed by **anti-inflammatories** if needed. Stop these medications as soon as your pain allows.

Vitamin C

Dr Robinson recommends taking Vitamin C 1000–1500 mg daily for at least 6 weeks after surgery.

Hand Therapy

Most people recover well with the home exercises in this guide. Hand Therapy can help if you need extra support with stiffness, scar care and tenderness in your palm, sensitivity or slow return of feeling, rebuilding grip and pinch strength, or getting back to heavy work or sport. Ask at your 2–3 week review. Hand therapy appointments are booked and paid for separately from your surgery.

YOUR FOLLOW-UP APPOINTMENT

WHEN	WHAT HAPPENS
2–3 weeks	Your post-op clinic review. A nurse will remove your dressings and check your wound.

KEY PRECAUTIONS — FIRST 2–3 WEEKS

- **Keep your fingers moving:** start your exercises the day after surgery. Making a full fist and fully straightening your fingers helps prevent stiffness and keeps the tendon gliding.
- **Use your hand for light tasks:** eating, dressing, typing and writing are fine as comfort allows.
- **Protect your palm:** avoid heavy gripping and lifting until your wound has healed.

When to contact us

Please contact our clinic straight away, or see your local doctor, if you notice:

- Swelling that is getting worse rather than better
- Redness, warmth or discharge around the wound
- A fever, or feeling generally unwell
- Pain that keeps increasing or isn't controlled by your medications
- New numbness in your finger or thumb
- Your finger still catching or locking once the wound has healed

Phone (07) 5346 8000 · Email admin@balanceortho.com.au

After hours: go to your nearest urgent care clinic or hospital emergency department.

RETURNING TO WORK, DRIVING & ACTIVITIES

Work

A reasonable goal for returning to office or desk work is within 1 week. For more physically demanding jobs, the usual target is 3–4 weeks.

Driving

Driving can usually be resumed the day after surgery, once you feel confident controlling the vehicle. Please check with your surgeon if you are unsure.

Return to Activities

These timeframes are a general guide. Please check with your surgeon or hand therapist before starting an activity.

ACTIVITY	EXPECTED TIMEFRAME	NOTES
Driving	The day after surgery	Once confident controlling the vehicle
Desk / computer work	Within 1 week	
Running	Within 1 week	
Swimming	Once your wound has healed	Usually after your 2–3 week review
Physically demanding work	3–4 weeks	Build up gripping gradually
Tennis	6 weeks	Build up grip gradually
Golf	6 weeks	Build up grip gradually

YOUR RECOVERY AT A GLANCE

WHEN	GOALS	WHAT YOU'LL BE DOING
Phase 1 Day 1 – 2/3 weeks Healing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wound healing Settle swelling Full finger movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove the bandage on day 1; keep the adhesive dressings on Raise your hand for the first 24–48 hours Start your exercises the day after surgery Light everyday use of your hand Driving from the day after surgery; desk work and running within 1 week
Phase 2 2/3 – 6 weeks Getting back to normal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normal use of your hand Scar care Rebuild grip 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dressings removed at your 2–3 week review Swimming once your wound has healed Physically demanding work from 3–4 weeks Hand therapy if needed for stiffness, scar care or strength
Phase 3 6 weeks + Full activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return to sport 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tennis and golf from 6 weeks Any remaining swelling or scar tenderness usually settles over the following weeks

YOUR EXERCISE PROGRAM

Start these exercises the day after surgery. Let pain be your guide and don't continue any exercise that hurts. These exercises are a guide only, and your hand therapist may give you a more specific program.

Start the day after surgery

- Repeat each exercise **5–10 times** per session.
- Aim for **3–5 sessions a day**.

1. Thumb opposition [▶ Watch the video](#)

Thumb-finger touches help coordination for tasks such as picking up small objects.

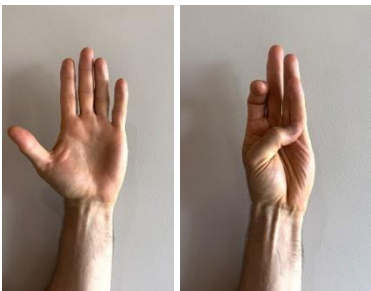
- Hold your hand open and touch each fingertip to your thumb, starting with the index finger and moving to the little finger, then reverse the order.
- Complete this exercise 3–5 times in each direction.



2. Thumb flexion [▶ Watch the video](#)

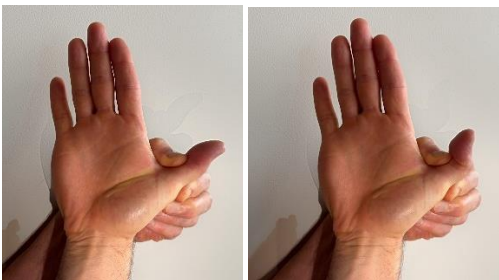
Thumb flexion to the base of the little finger.

- Hold your hand and thumb open, then touch your thumb to the base of your little finger, bending the thumb at each of its joints.
- Repeat 10 times, 3 times a day.



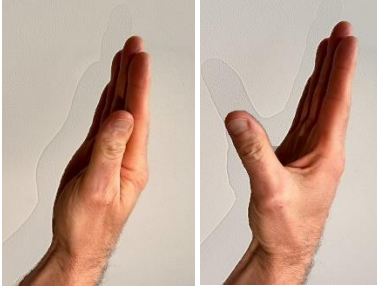
3. IPJ blocking

- With your unaffected hand, hold and support the injured or stiff thumb at the middle joint (MCPJ).
- Stop the middle joint from bending.
- Bend and straighten the tip of your thumb.



4. Palmar adduction / abduction

- Place your thumb in line with your index finger.
- Move your thumb away from your palm at the level of the index finger, as if you are about to pick up a cup.



5. Retropulsion

- Place your hand flat on a table or other flat surface.
- Lower your thumb so it is pointing to the floor.
- Actively lift your thumb slightly above the level of the flat surface.

6. Scar massage (once your wound has healed)

- Once your dressings are off and the wound has fully healed, gently massage the scar with a non-perfumed moisturiser.
- Use firm, small circular movements along and around the scar for a few minutes, 2–3 times a day.
- This helps soften the scar and reduce tenderness in your palm. Your hand therapist can show you how.

Watch the exercises on YouTube

Most exercises in this guide are demonstrated in a short video on our YouTube channel. Tap “► Watch the video” next to an exercise or scan the QR code to see all of our videos.

youtube.com/@BalanceOrthopaedics



This guide has been developed with reference to published post-operative guidelines for trigger thumb release. It is a general guide only and does not replace individual assessment and advice from your surgeon and hand therapist.