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2026

After Hand Surgery: Thumb Ulnar Collateral Ligament (UCL) Repair

Halifax Infirmary, QE II

What happened during my surgery?

- You had surgery to fix a ligament on the inside of your thumb. Ligaments help your fingers move.
- After your surgery, you will have a splint or a cast.

Can I move my thumb?

- **Do not** move your thumb until your surgeon says it is OK.
- You may move your other fingers if it does not cause you discomfort or pain.
- **Do not** grip, pinch, or lift anything using your operated hand.
- **Do not** play sports or lift anything heavier than 10 pounds (like groceries, laundry, children).
- **If you use your hand too soon, it can damage the repaired ligament**.

How do I care for my splint or cast?

- Wear your splint or cast **at all times**. **Do not** remove it unless told by your surgeon.
- Keep your splint or cast and your hand dry.
  - To bathe or shower, use a plastic bag or plastic wrap to cover your arm up to your elbow.
  - **Do not** soak your hand until your surgeon says it is OK.
- If your splint is soft or loose, call the Plastic Surgery Clinic.
  - Phone: 902-473-7518

Swelling and discomfort

- It is normal to have swelling and stiffness after surgery.
- To help lower swelling, **keep your hand raised above your heart for 3 days as much as you can (for example, raised on pillows when sitting, or in a sling when walking)**.

Call your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) or surgeon if:

- › You do not have control of your thumb
- › You have more pain or swelling
- › Your thumb feels numb
- › Your thumb changes colour (like white, blue, or purple)
- › You have a fever (temperature above 38 °C or 100.4 °F) or chills

If you cannot reach your primary health care provider or surgeon, go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.

Can I drive?

☐ Yes. **If you are not taking opioids**, you may drive 24 hours after surgery.

☐ No. **Do not drive until your surgeon says it is safe**.

Follow-up appointment

Plastic Surgery Clinic, Halifax Infirmary

- › Phone: 902-473-7518

Date: _____ Time: _____

This pamphlet is for educational purposes only. It is not intended to replace the advice or professional judgment of a health care provider. The information may not apply to all situations. If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

Find all patient education resources here:
www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources

Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time:
Call 811 or visit: https://811.novascotia.ca

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