

Cubital Tunnel release

Information for patients

Nottingham Shoulder and Elbow Unit



This document can be provided in different languages and formats. For more information please contact:

Physiotherapy Department
City Hospital
Hucknall Road, Nottingham
Tel: 0115 969 1169 ext 54632

This booklet contains information about the surgery that you have been advised to have and aims to answer some of the questions you may have about the operation and your stay in hospital.

About surgery at City Hospital

There are three orthopaedic wards at City Hospital: Theatre Admission Lounge, Harvey 1 and Edward 2. You will be admitted to one of these wards during your stay in hospital. On each ward a 'named nurse' will be allocated to you to co-ordinate your nursing care. A physiotherapist will supervise your rehabilitation. The physio may see you before, rather than after your surgery.

You will usually be admitted to the hospital on the day of your operation, and you will usually go home the same day once you have had an x-ray, occasionally you may be required to stay overnight. If you think you will need transport to get home or help when you get home please tell your named nurse when you first come in.

What to bring

You need to bring in with you any medicines that you are taking, toiletries, towel, nightwear and some loose and comfortable clothing. Please leave valuables at home.

Operation day

Your anaesthetist will see you on the morning of the operation to discuss your anaesthetic with you. You will be able to eat and drink as usual the day before your operation. You may be able to have an early morning drink even on the day of your operation. The time you have to stop eating will depend upon the time of your operation.

Cubital tunnel syndrome – what is it?

The cubital tunnel is a small tunnel on the inside of your elbow. The tunnel is formed by the bones, ligaments, and muscles in the elbow. The ulnar nerve (one of the main nerves of your hand) passes through this tunnel as it travels from the neck, down the arm, to the hand. Your “funny bone” is the area where the ulnar nerve passes through the cubital tunnel to bend around the inside of your elbow. Movement of the elbow requires the ulnar nerve to stretch and glide through the cubital tunnel.

Cubital tunnel syndrome is the effects of pressure on the ulnar nerve in the tunnel. Symptoms you may experience include pain, weakness, swelling, clumsiness of the hand, pins and needles, and/or numbness in the little and ring fingers.

Cubital tunnel release

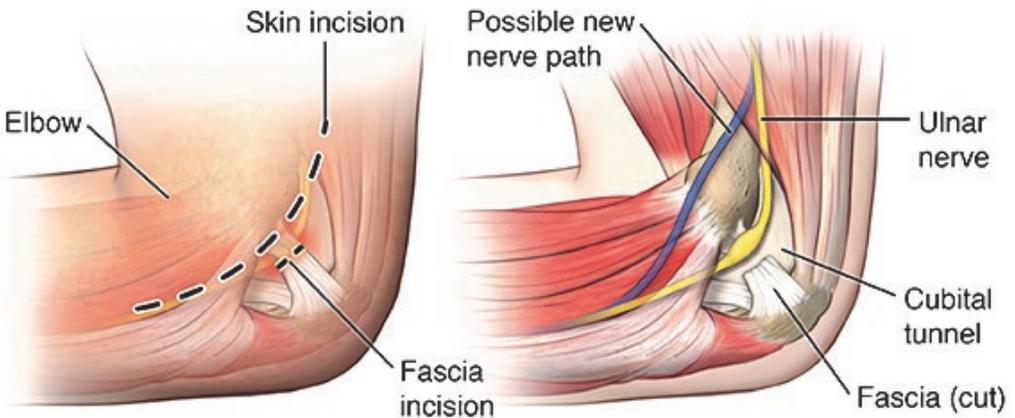


Image copied from: <https://www.ladanhajipour.com/conditions/hand/cubital-tunnel-syndrome/>

What causes it?

Hitting your funny bone will irritate the nerve, causing a brief feeling of shock or tingling sensations.

Cubital tunnel syndrome is caused, over time, by a progressive irritation of the nerve. Repetitive tasks that involve keeping your elbow bent, or leaning on your elbow for long periods, can increase the pressure in the tunnel and irritate the nerve. It can also be caused by a permanent narrowing of the tunnel, either by scar tissue from an old injury, or arthritis in the elbow.

Surgical treatment – cubital tunnel release

The operation is an open procedure, meaning you will have a scar along the inside of your elbow. The surgery involves cutting through the fascia (tissue) roof of the tunnel to help relieve the pressure on the nerve.

The aim of surgery is to prevent your problem worsening. It is not guaranteed to resolve your symptoms.

In some cases the surgeon will want to move the ulnar nerve out of the tunnel completely. This is called an ulnar nerve transposition. The nerve is moved to the front of the elbow, to prevent it catching when you bend and straighten your elbow.

After the operation - how will it look?

You will have a soft bandage around your elbow. If you have stitches, these will be removed by your GP, usually in 10 days, but longer if your surgeon asks for this.

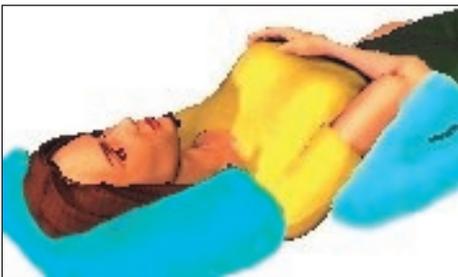
How can I sleep?

Sleeping on your operated elbow may be uncomfortable. We recommend sleeping on your back, or opposite side, with pillows supporting your operated arm. Feather pillows are easier to use than foam ones.

One pillow slightly folded under your neck gives enough support for most people.

A pillow folded in half supports your arm in front.

A pillow tucked along your back helps to prevent you rolling onto your operated arm in the night.



If sleeping on your back, tie a pillow tightly in the middle (a "butterfly pillow"), or use the folded pillow shown before.

Fold a pillow to go under the operated elbow.

Rehabilitation

Gentle early range of movement of the fingers, wrist, and elbow are allowed from day 1 of the surgery. We would advise avoidance of any heavy lifting / loading activities, and avoid leaning on the elbow for the first 6-8 weeks.

This operation does not routinely need outpatient physiotherapy follow up. You will be seen in the surgeon's clinic around 6-8 weeks post-op. These clinic reviews are important as they provide answers to any questions you may have, they pick up on any complications and they monitor your progress with your rehab

When can I go home?

You will go home the same day as your operation once you are well enough.

When can I expect to return to normal activities?

This depends on your symptoms. Light functional use of the arm can start on day 1, most people are comfortable by between 6 to 12 weeks after surgery. As you recover from the procedure and any swelling settles down it is normal to have some pain. This should be manageable with medication Your pins and needles, numbness, or hand clumsiness symptoms may take longer to resolve, as nerves are slow to heal.

Driving can resume when you are comfortable and safe to control a car. It is wise to discuss this with your insurance company.

The following table gives you the timescales for the amount of time required for different tissue healing:

Tissues	Time
Soft tissues	12 weeks
Nerves	1 year

Nottingham Shoulder and Elbow Unit Therapy website

<https://www.nuh.nhs.uk/shoulder-and-elbow-physiotherapy-unit>

Useful contact numbers

City Hospital Campus (0115) 969 1169

Dial the City Hospital campus number above, listen to the recorded message and then dial the appropriate extension from the list below.

	Available	Extension
Clinic reception (To alter your clinic appointment)	Mon– Fri 9am - 5pm	55306
Shoulder and Elbow secretaries: Genevieve Stewart-Smith Amy	Mon – Fri 9am – 5pm	55047 56899
Occupational Therapy	Mon – Fri 8am – 4pm	55330
Physiotherapy Shoulder and Elbow Team		54580
Therapy Reception (To alter a Therapy appointment)		55310 55330 56119
Wards	24 hours if urgent	
Edward 2 Ward		55879
Harvey 1 Ward		55904/6
Theatre Admission Lounge		76441

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care or treatment please speak to a member of staff or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

Freephone: 0800 183 0204

From a mobile or abroad: 0115 924 9924 ext 65412 or 62301

E-mail: pals@nuh.nhs.uk

Letter: NUH NHS Trust, c/o PALS, Freepost NEA 14614, Nottingham NG7 1BR

www.nuh.nhs.uk

The Trust endeavours to ensure that the information given here is accurate and impartial.