

5. Compression: Light compression from an elastic glove or compression bandage (i.e. Coban tape or Tubigrip) can help reduce swelling. As a precaution, compression should not be extreme. If it causes increased swelling, pain or changes in sensation or colour of the hand, consult your doctor, nurse or therapist for further advice.

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#### Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

If you have a compliment, complaint or concern, please contact our PALS team on 020 7288 5551 or [whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net](mailto:whh-tr.whitthealthPALS@nhs.net)

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## Hand and Wrist Swelling Management

### A patient's guide



## What is Swelling?

Swelling occurs as part of your body's natural response to an injury or surgery. It acts as a cushion to the damaged area. The fluid contains the cells and substances required to help the damaged area repair.

## Why can Swelling be a problem?

If swelling lingers in your hand for too long it can cause your joints to become stiff and painful. Swelling fluid is thicker than your normal body fluid, and becomes even thicker if it becomes trapped in one place for too long. This will prevent your joints and tendons from gliding and moving as they should.

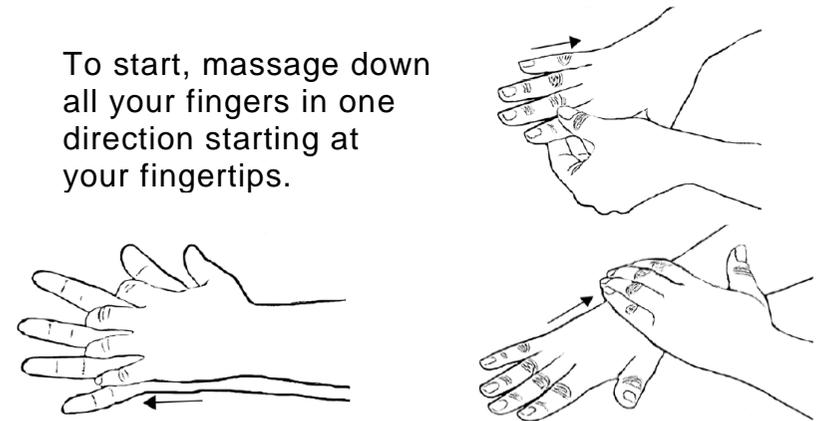
## How can I reduce Swelling?

All treatments should be used under the direction of your therapist, nurse or doctor. Any sudden increase in swelling, pins and needles, numbness or pain should be reported.

1. **Elevation:** Elevation promotes more efficient lymphatic drainage from the hand. This is achieved by resting the swollen hand above the level of your heart. For example at rest place your arm on a pillow or cushion so the hand is above the elbow.
2. **Active Movement:** Muscle contractions aid lymphatic drainage. It is important to move the whole arm and shoulder. For example, you can raise your hand above your head whilst you open and close your fist.

3. **Contrast bathing:** Contrast bathing involves alternating use of warm and cold water to stimulate the circulation system. To do this:
  - Fill one container with cold water and the other with warm water. Only use tap water and ensure there is no extremes in temperature (i.e. do not use ice or hot water). Extreme temperatures may worsen swelling.
  - Alternate hand between the warm and cold water for 30-60 seconds each time, Repeat this 6 times
  - After the last immersion (cold water) dry the skin thoroughly. Complete massage of the affected hand with aqueous cream.
4. **Retrograde Massage:** Massage can help reduce swelling. Massage gently using a water-based moisturising cream.

To start, massage down all your fingers in one direction starting at your fingertips.



Then massage up your palm through your finger spaces and down the back of your hand and forearm finishing at your elbow.