

Wrist arthroscopy

This procedure is commonly used in wrist surgery as a diagnostic aid more than a therapeutic intervention. Only about 20% of wrist arthroscopy is therapeutic.

The operation is performed as a day case under general anaesthetic. The procedure usually takes 30 to 40 min. You can expect to be in hospital for a few hours while being prepared for surgery, being taken down to the operating theatre, having the surgery and recovering afterwards. Simple painkillers are sometimes required during the first 24 to 48 hours. Incisions are very small and closed by Steristrips™. These can be soaked off in 3 to 4 days. If they continue to bleed then a small Elastoplast dressing will suffice. I encourage patients to wash their wounds in normal soap and water from about 3 days post surgery. I review all my patients at two weeks to check wound healing and to see that they are recovering a good range of movement and function. We can have a better discussion about the arthroscopy at this stage. Many patients are too sleepy after the surgery to fully discuss the procedure and its consequences.

There are many ‘portals’ we can use but the commonest are the four central ones on the back of the wrist. I rarely make a portal on the palm side of the wrist, but may use one to remove a ganglion for example.



Possible portals



Operative set-up



Introducing the scope



Using a 'shaver' to trim soft tissue



Looking in to the second row of the wrist (the mid-carpal joint)



Using a palmar wrist portal for ganglion surgery



The portals on the back of the wrist at the end of the procedure



And the single palm side portal



Steristrips™ applied





Local anaesthetic is put in to make it less painful on waking, and then the dressing goes on.