



## **Low Plastic Surgery (LPS)**

Dr. Lowe's Facts about Nerve Surgery of the Hand

### **How do I get started?**

It is important prior to surgery for patients to spend some time educating themselves about the pros and cons of nerve surgery of the hand. Although patients who undergo nerve surgery of the hand are typically happy, this elective operation is not for everybody. The main risks of surgery are bleeding, infection, damage to adjacent structure, pain, contour irregularity, and scarring. Read the educational materials provided and on our website including consent forms prior to your surgery. Make sure that your surgeon is Board Certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) and American Society for Surgery of the Hand Surgery (ASSH). Please check out websites and links at: [www.drjlowe.com](http://www.drjlowe.com)

### **Do I need nerve surgery of the hand?**

Patients with a nerve compression or nerve injuries of the hand are usually the best candidates for in hospital based surgery under regional or general anesthetic. Patients considering nerve surgery of the hand need to decide if the risks are worth it or not? Are the nerve symptoms or pain worth the risk of surgery? Many doctors say if the clinical symptoms are minor patients should not worry about it. Unfortunately, many peripheral nerve problems of the hand are progressive and may be associated with increasing pain or loss of function. It is usually best to consider peripheral nerve surgery of the hand when the symptoms start to significantly limit activity as long as the patient is otherwise in good health. Sometimes nerve problems of the hand improve, but almost always symptoms get worse slowly over time. Also as the symptoms increase the surgical procedures and recovery may increase disproportionately. The most important thing is for patients to undergo surgery when they are ready and medically stable for surgery. A frank discussion with a board certified plastic surgeon and hand surgeon will help patients make the right decision about this procedure.

### **Is nerve surgery of the hand covered by health insurance?**

Nerve surgery of the hand by definition is a medical procedure. It is covered by insurance as a stand-alone procedure. Nerve surgery of the hand that occurs after trauma or following reconstruction may be covered under revision medical coding. Many patients undergoing nerve surgery of the hand require a referral from their primary care physician or pre-approval from their insurance in advance of surgery. A very small number of minor nerve surgeries can be performed in our office or under local anesthesia. These procedures are usually covered by insurance, but patients are required to pay part or all of their deductible in advance. Patients are encouraged to review the fees associated with nerve surgery of the hand with our office or their insurance before surgery. Dr. Lowe's staff will be happy to discuss these issues during the course of the consultation and consent process.

### **What is the difference between local or general anesthesia?**

There are a number of different ways to perform hand surgery. Most plastic surgeons or hand surgeon performing significant surgery near joint or tendon spaces or other vital structure prefer patients to be under anesthesia to ensure patient comfort and safety. Very minor procedures can on occasion be performed under local anesthetic. Local procedures require preparation and local injection that can be well managed in certain areas. In our practice surgery of the hand is billed based on size, location, and complexity of the procedure. Patients rarely complain of significant pain following nerve surgery of the hand regardless of the technique. A consultation with a plastics surgeon and hand surgeon allows patients to determine the technique best suited for them.

**Will the surgical scar be noticeable?**

All hand surgery requires surgical incisions in the skin. Multiple incisions are required in most cases for complex peripheral nerve reconstruction. Plastic surgeons try to place incisions in the natural creases or folds of the hand to conceal the scar. Dr. Lowe will review scar treatment once the incisions fully heal. Scars typically look the worse at 2 months and then improve by 6 months. Prominent scars are rare but can be improved with minor revision or laser treatment. Contour irregularities can be seen due to soft tissue displacement, scarring, or patient genetics (some patients just scar more). Patients should have a frank discussion with their plastic surgeon or hand surgeon to help them understand where the incision or scar will be placed.

**Will the nerve disorder recur, come back, stay the same, or get worse?**

The results of peripheral nerve surgery of the hand do not always last forever. The recurrence rate for most peripheral nerve compressions should be no more than 10%. The improvement in clinical symptoms is directly related to the surgery being performed. There are a number of patients who undergo peripheral nerve surgery who do not improve, but most of these patients symptoms rarely worsen. All peripheral nerve surgery of the hand has the chance of worsening symptoms and resulting in chronic pain. Most patients with significant nerve disease of the hand will require postoperative pain management and rehabilitation. Dr. Lowe will discuss his findings as well as the pathology or disease identified after surgery or at follow-up.

**Does future revision nerve surgery of the hand cost a lot?**

The cost for revision nerve surgery of the hand can be substantial. Most revisions must be performed after a peripheral nerve evaluation or electro-diagnostic exams. In some cases, revision hand surgery is necessary to address more complex issues. Complicated nerve surgery of the hand often carries a greater risk of revision. Patients should follow post-operative instructions and rehabilitation closely to limit revision rates. Patients should usually wait 6-8 months to fully judge clinical results of peripheral nerve surgery or surgical scars. Dr. Lowe performs a number of revisions on patients who are unhappy with a previous hand surgeon. Most of these patients had hand surgery with well-trained hand surgeons. Dr. Lowe recommends patients first return to their board certified hand surgeon to discuss common concerns, complications, or recurrence. Patients should talk to their surgeon about the risks and potential complications of hand surgery.

**Where and when should I have nerve surgery of the hand?**

One of the most important decisions for patients considering nerve surgery of the hand is where and when. Larger procedures can be performed at a hospital with overnight stay or surgical facility with home care. The benefit of a hospital setting is overnight pain management and care. Patients in a surgical facility will be given a period of recovery and then go home the same day. In general, minor nerve procedures of the hand such as Carpal Tunnel surgery are better in outpatient setting and larger nerve procedures or those performed near vital structures or tendon sheaths are better in an insurance approached surgical setting. Most patients require very little assistance at home the day after the procedure, feel better at 2 days, and are stable by 3 weeks. Although Dr. Lowe performs most nerve surgery of the hand at a hospital or surgical center under regional or local, each patient should make their own decision of when and where they should have surgery.

**What is the recovery like after nerve surgery of the hand?**

The recovery from nerve surgery of the hand is usually predictable. Patients are asked to limit activity and keep the hand strictly elevated for at least 1 week. Most patients are placed in a light splint for several days. Some patients require drains to help decrease swelling. Sutures usually stay for 2-3 weeks and may even fall out on their own. Patients scars may take years to fully mature. Patients report swelling, numbness, and pain for up to 6 months. A number of patients require rehabilitation with a hand therapist to allow for full recovery. Most patients requiring a hand therapist or occupational therapist will need to be seen for several months. Patients are

encouraged to talk to Dr. Lowe about recovery and the need for professional rehabilitation services.

### **What about patient safety?**

There are a variety of safety concerns related to nerve surgery of the hand. Many of the concerns are related to post-operative swelling and pain control. Some patients can develop problems with chronic pain following even minor hand surgery. However, in most cases the safety of surgery is most dependent on the surgeon and facility. Hand surgery is usually an elective operation reserved in for patients in good health in an outpatient setting. Dr. Lowe is a real plastic surgeon and hand surgeon, who performs real hand surgery, in a real surgical center. As a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) and American Society for Surgery of the Hand (ASSH) he is required to follow guidelines designed to ensure the best patient safety and outcomes. Dr. Lowe proudly performs surgery in accredited hospitals and surgical facilities. Most of his surgical patients undergo surgery at his certified in-office operating suite, Associates Surgery Center of Oklahoma (ASCO). ASCO is fully certified by the American Association for the Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgery Facilities (AAAASF). For further information about safety and credentials go to: [www.AAAASF.org](http://www.AAAASF.org) or [www.drjlowe.com](http://www.drjlowe.com)

### **Should I wait and think about my options?**

Peripheral nerve surgery of the hand is rarely an urgent surgery. Most patients have been dealing with nerve problems of the hand or extremity for years before they seek consultation. In general, nerve surgery of the hand usually requires a referral from a primary care physician and /or a nerve study prior to or after consultation. Although the procedures carry risks, the benefits can be substantial. Patients require a period of recovery, splinting, and rehabilitation. Further procedures may be required based on the clinical outcome or disease process. Patient should choose a board certified plastic surgeon & hand surgeon that they trust, takes time, reviews risks, and puts safety first. One of the most important aspects of the procedures is patient care and follow-up. When possible, patients should talk about their plans with physicians, family members, and significant others. Patients should have realistic expectations regarding the nerve surgery of the hand, recovery, and results. Nerve surgery of the hand surgery is often the right thing for the right person

### **What are Dr. Lowe's take home points?**

1. Review indications for the surgery and ensure a proper pre-operative work-up.
2. Make sure you have an adequate time to recover and care for the wound.
3. Understand risks (bleeding, infection, damage to adjacent structures, pain, and scars).
4. Undergo nerve surgery of the hand before function is significantly compromised.
5. Strict elevation is required for 5-7 days after surgery.
6. Most nerve surgery of the hand is quick with a short recovery.
7. Nerve surgery of the hand does not always fully solve the problem.
8. Some nerve disease of the hand is the result of a more significant nerve disorder.
9. Some had surgery should be performed at a hospital and require an overnight stay.
10. Surgeon and facility certification and safety matters.