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Restoring severed limbs

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Fifty-year-old Sriram Pandit (name changed), a factory worker, lost one of his thumbs when the hand got trapped in a rolling machine. Though Pandit was rushed to hospital within six hours of the accident — the time limit to restore a severed limb — the thumb couldn't be reconstructed as the nerves and tissues were badly damaged.

The thumb, however, could finally be rebuilt at another hospital, thanks to the newly-developed microvascular reconstructive surgery.

"We reconstructed the thumb with one of his toes. The toe nerves and tissues were joined with those in the hand through microscopic surgery," explained reconstructive surgeon Anupam Golash.

Golash and his team reconstructed Pandit's thumb after a 10-hour surgery at CMRI. Now, Pandit can move his fingers but will take another six months to recover fully.

Reconstructive surgery in the city has achieved several feats in the past five years, claim plastic surgeons. "From reconstruction, we have moved on to microvascular surgery. We take tissues and nerves from one part of the body to reconstruct the damaged area," said plastic surgeon Arindam Sarkar.

Sarkar has successfully operated on a patient suffering from oral cancer at SSKM Hospital. "The patient's cheeks and lower jaw bones were badly affected by cancer and had to be removed. The jawline was reconstructed with muscles, bone and tissues from one of his legs," Sarkar said.

According to doctors, flap surgery is also very popular in Calcutta. In this method, the main artery is not damaged but a soft tissue from one of its branches is taken and used to cover the damaged area.