

Patient information

Trigger Finger and Trigger Thumb

Therapies Department

What is it?

Trigger finger and thumb are painful conditions which cause your fingers or thumb to catch or 'lock' in a bent position. The problem occurs where the tendons that bend your finger (Flexor tendons), pass through a protective covering called the tendon sheath.

Flexor tendons are tough, fibrous bands of tissue which connect to the muscles of your forearm and allow you to bend your fingers or thumb, for example; making a fist.

A tendon usually glides easily through its sheath. Occasionally a tendon may become inflamed, swollen or a lump may develop (nodule) and the tendon sheath may become thickened.

When this happens, gripping objects or making a tight fist can cause the tendon to catch in the tendon sheath making it lock, catch or you may experience a "popping" sensation when trying to straightening the finger

Who gets it?

- It can affect all ages, but its peak age is 55-60.
- Can happen in either hand but more common in the dominant hand.
- More common in women rather than men.
- Most common in the thumb and ring finger. Also can occur in the middle, little and index fingers.

Cause

- No one cause.
- Often no obvious cause.
- May be aggravated with highly repetitive or forceful movements.

Often occurs with other medical conditions such as diabetes and arthritis.

Symptoms

- Pain in the palm at the base of your affected finger or thumb - You may be able to feel a small nodule or lump in this area.
- Catching, locking or sticking of your finger in a bent position.
- There may be a popping sensation as your fingers are straightened.
- Common after sleep as you tend to sleep with your fingers bent for long periods.
- In some cases your affected finger or thumb becomes locked in a bent position as the condition becomes more severe, it then has to be gently straightened with the other hand.
- In advanced cases joint contractures may develop.

Treatment

Mild symptoms may go away by themselves.

Trigger finger often responds well with conservative treatment with referral to hand therapy:

- A splint can be given to wear at night to prevent the finger triggering and help to straighten your finger.
- A small splint can be made for during the day to prevent your finger triggering during activity.
- Massage into your palm and affected finger.
- Hand exercises can be taught to help your tendons to glide more smoothly.

Medical intervention for trigger finger and thumb

- Steroid injections into your tendon sheath may help to relieve symptoms.
- Where symptoms persist or are more severe then the most successful treatment is surgery. Surgery is carried out to release the tendon sheath helping the tendon to glide more easily. This is usually carried out under a local anaesthetic as a day case. Symptoms usually resolve quickly and only a small scar is left.

Feedback

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Following your discharge from hospital or attendance at your outpatient appointment you will receive a text asking if you would recommend our service to others. Please take the time to text back, you will not be charged for the text and can opt out at any point. Your co-operation is greatly appreciated.

Further Information

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