

Patient Handout: Trigger Finger

WHAT IS TRIGGER FINGER?

Trigger finger or thumb (also known as stenosing tenosynovitis) is a condition causing **pain, stiffness, or difficulty straightening your finger or thumb** once it is bent. Your finger or thumb may become stuck or locked in a bent position, and straighten with a snap – like a trigger.

Trigger finger is caused by swelling and inflammation of the tendon and the tendon sheath (a protective tendon covering). The tendon cannot slide easily through the sheath and can bunch up to form a small lump (nodule) at the base of the finger or thumb.

Trigger finger symptoms:

- Finger locking into a bent position
- Pain or lump at the base of the finger
- Clicking
- Worse in the morning



WHAT CAUSES TRIGGER FINGER?

- Repetitive gripping like biking, pruning plants, packing objects.
- Repeated use of your hands or a tool, like a drill or wrench, can irritate and inflame the finger tendons.
- But most of the time, the cause of trigger finger is unknown.

Trigger finger tends to be more common in:

- Women
- Age above 40
- Conditions like gout, diabetes, arthritis, hypothyroidism or pregnancy
- After a previous hand injury

HOW IS TRIGGER FINGER DIAGNOSED?

Trigger finger is diagnosed by a doctor from your symptoms and examining your hand. Tests like X-rays or scans are usually not required.

HOW CAN I TREAT MY TRIGGER FINGER?

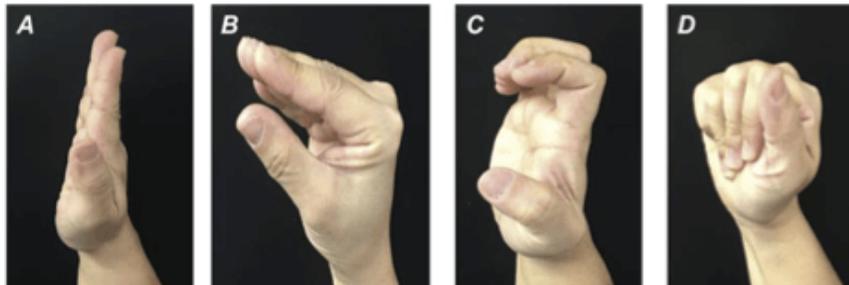
- Rest your finger for 1-2 weeks.
- **Apply warm or cold packs** 3-5 times per day, whichever feels better. This reduces pain and stiffness.
- **Change your activities:** Avoid work or hobbies that involve prolonged gripping, grasping, or repetitive motions, especially if they worsen pain.
- **Use anti-inflammatories** like topical gels (voltaren or diclofenac gel), or pills like ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve). **Anti-inflammatory pills should not be taken for longer than six weeks straight, or if your doctor has told you to avoid them.*
- **Wear padded gloves** for lengthy drives, biking, gardening, and using exercise machines.

- **Splint the trigger finger/thumb at night for at least 4-6 weeks** to prevent it from bending and locking while you sleep. You can either:

- Buy a splint online or from a medical equipment shop, OR
- Make your own with tape and an ice cream stick



- **Gentle stretching exercises**



Make a straight fist (A), table top fist (B), claw grip (C), straight fist (A) and composite fist (D) without allowing your finger to trigger. Repeat 5 times per grip, every 2-3 hours.

WHEN SHOULD I SEE MY DOCTOR?

If the above home methods do not get rid of your trigger finger symptoms after 6-12 weeks, or the trigger finger keeps coming back, see your doctor again.

The doctor may recommend the following:

Steroid injections: Corticosteroid, or cortisone, is an anti-inflammatory agent that can be injected into the tendon sheath at the base of the trigger finger.

- The injection may resolve the triggering over one day to several weeks.
- If symptoms do not improve after 3 months, a second injection may be given.
- If two injections do not help the problem, surgery may be considered.



Surgery: The doctor may refer you to a plastic surgeon for a **trigger finger release surgery**, which opens up the tendon sheath so that the tendon can glide freely.

- Surgery is normally reserved for severe cases of trigger finger.
- The surgery usually takes 30 minutes and you can go home the same day after surgery.
- You can move the finger after surgery, and resume regular activities once comfort permits. Recovery can take anywhere from a couple weeks to a few months.

