

Flexor Tendon Injury

“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”

Marybeth Ezaki, MD, Past President, American Society for Surgery of the Hand

What are flexor tendons, and what do they do?



Flexor tendons of the wrist, fingers and thumb shown in blue

The flexor tendons are strong, smooth cords that connect the muscles of the forearm to the bones in the fingers and thumb on the palm side of the hand. These tendons allow us to bend our wrist, hold on to a coffee cup, button our shirt, open jars and perform everyday activities that require bending our fingers and thumb.

How do flexor tendons become injured, and what are the symptoms of a flexor tendon injury?

Flexor tendon injuries usually occur as a result of a cut to the palm side of the hand. Injuries can also occur in sports or due to arthritic conditions. A “Jersey Finger” happens when a finger is caught on another player’s jersey or clothes and the tendon is pulled off from the tip of the bone. Bone spurs or inflamed joint fluid from arthritis can fray and sometimes rupture flexor tendons. Symptoms of a flexor tendon injury include pain, swelling, tenderness and the inability to bend the finger.



Example of an injured ring finger flexor tendon in which the finger is held straight instead of bent

Example of an injured ring finger flexor tendon in which the finger is held straight instead of bent

What is the treatment for a flexor tendon injury?

A flexor tendon injury is serious. Cut or ruptured tendons do not heal by themselves and require surgery. A hand surgeon will test the tendons individually to determine which tendons have been affected. X-rays may be taken if the injury was caused by glass or other debris.

What can a hand therapist do for me?

A hand therapist is an important part of post-surgical care. After surgery, the hand therapist will fabricate a custom-made orthosis and start a protected exercise program. The goals of therapy are to provide gentle motion to the healing tendon in order to prevent scarring and to prevent separation of the tendon. The physician, hand therapist and patient work together as a team in order to achieve the best possible outcomes after a flexor tendon injury.



Example of flexor tendon orthosis to protect the injured finger