

Trigger Finger

“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 is trigger finger?

Trigger finger is inflammation of one of the tendons, or cord-like structures on the palm side of the hand, that allows the fingers and thumb to bend. The tendon is surrounded by a fluid-filled tube or sheath that allows the tendon to glide more easily. When the tendon is inflamed, it cannot slide easily, making it difficult to bend or straighten the finger or thumb. This is also known as tendonitis.



What are the symptoms of trigger finger?

The first sign of trigger finger may be pain and a small nodule or bump in the palm of the hand. A physician or certified hand therapist may feel for tenderness and swelling at the base of the finger or thumb. The patient will be asked to make a fist and then straighten the fingers. The affected finger or thumb may stay curled and then suddenly pop to a straight position, as if releasing the trigger of a gun. This repeated catching and releasing continues to irritate the tendon. If the condition persists for several months, the finger may become stiff.

What causes trigger finger?

Often the cause of trigger finger is unknown; however, trigger finger may occur with repeated gripping, or

with the use of tools, such as a drill or wrench. It is also more common in people with diabetes, arthritis or when there has been an injury to the palm of the hand.

What is the treatment for trigger finger?

If the symptoms are mild, the physician may prescribe anti-inflammatory medication. If the triggering is moderate to severe, the physician may recommend a cortisone injection along with a custom-made orthosis designed to rest the finger. Surgery may be recommended if resting or injections do not relieve the triggering.

What can a hand therapist do for me?

The physician may refer the patient to a hand therapist for non-operative and post-surgical treatment. For non-operative treatment, the certified hand therapist has specialized training to fabricate a custom orthosis to rest the finger, and to teach the patient exercises to avoid stiffness during the healing process. The certified hand therapist will also discuss ways to modify activities while the finger is healing. Hand therapy following surgery will improve range of motion, and teach the patient how to regain the function of the hand.



Orthosis for Trigger Finger