Patient information

NHS
Golden Jubilee

Trigger finger and trigger thumb



Important information for patients who suffer from trigger finger and trigger thumb.

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About this booklet

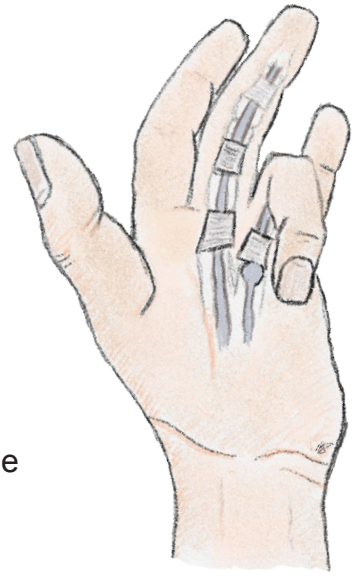
The purpose of this booklet is to tell you about Trigger Finger and Trigger Thumb and how they can be treated.

About Trigger Finger and Trigger Thumb

Trigger Finger is a condition where a finger or thumb clicks, catches or locks as it bends and straightens.

Symptoms

- Pain in the palm of the hand.
- Tender when pressed.
- Finger clicks with movement or gets stuck in a bent position.
- Stiffness which causes difficulty bending the thumb.
- Finger becomes stuck in a bent position and you are unable to release it yourself. (If this happens, you will need to seek urgent medical attention so the joint does not become permanently stiff.)



Causes

The tendons that bend your fingers run into a tunnel. If the mouth of the tunnel becomes thickened, the tendon can swell, causing it to catch in the mouth of the tunnel. People with diabetes are more prone to getting trigger finger.

Diagnosing Trigger Finger and Trigger Thumb

Diagnosis is usually made by:

- talking about your symptoms and the troubles you are having,
- examining your hand

Treatment options

Trigger finger does not usually cause harm, however it can be a nuisance and painful.

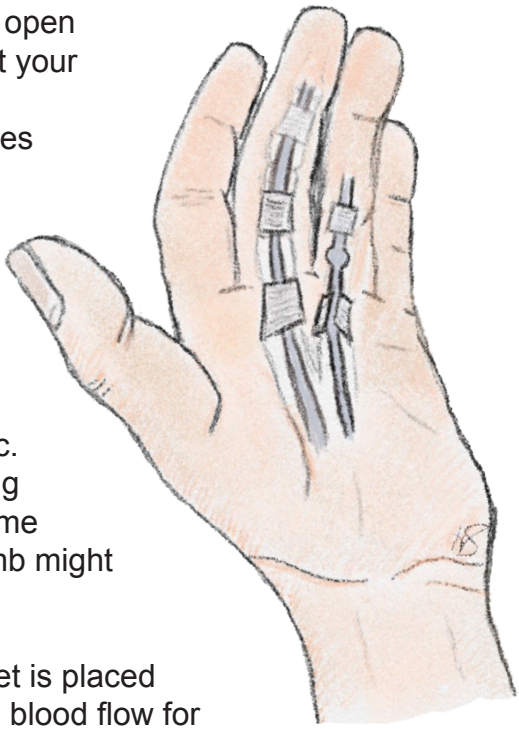
Non-surgical treatment

Some mild cases resolve without treatment. There are a number of non-surgical treatment options.

- Splint: Putting a splint on the finger to keep it straight at night keeps the swollen area of the tendon inside the tunnel and help it smooth back down. You could use a simple lollipop stick as a home-made splint.
- Steroid injection: A steroid injection into the affected finger or thumb can improve your symptoms. This is effective in about 70% of people, but the success rate is lower if you have diabetes. The injection can be carried out in the outpatient clinic. You would be able to drive after an injection.

If your symptoms persist despite non-surgical treatment, surgery may be an option.

Surgical treatment – Trigger Finger or Trigger Thumb Release Surgery



The aim of the operation is to open the entrance to the tunnel that your finger tendon runs on to let it glide freely. The operation takes about 10 minutes to perform so is carried out under local anaesthetic as a day case.

The palm of your hand near the finger/thumb will be numbed with local anaesthetic. You should not feel pain during the operation but may feel some pressure and your finger/thumb might go numb.

A tight band called a tourniquet is placed on your upper arm to stop the blood flow for a few minutes so that the surgeon has a good view to perform the operation.

The surgeon will cut through the skin, divide the entrance of the tunnel, make sure that there is no more catching of the finger and then stitch you up.

Risks

- Tender scar: This can last for a few months and can be improved by massaging the scar. You will be shown how to do this before you go home.
- Swelling: Your finger will feel a bit swollen for a while after the surgery.
- Infection and Bleeding: There is a small risk of infection or bleeding.
- Recurrence: Although it is uncommon to get triggering again in the same finger/thumb, some people develop it in other fingers/ thumbs.
- Numbness: The risk of a serious severe complication is very low (<1%). The nerves that supply your finger are very close to the tendon and there is a very small chance that a nerve could be injured. This could leave you with some numbness in the finger or a painful nerve swelling called a neuroma.
- Complex Regional Pain Syndrome: This is a very rare condition that can occur after any hand surgery. It causes stiffness, swelling and pain out of proportion to the procedure. It is like a reflex that hasn't switched off. This can be treated with pain relief and physiotherapy.

Recovery period

You will have stitches in for 10-14 days. It is really important that you keep your fingers moving throughout this time. You can use your hand for light tasks during this period.

You should check with your insurance company before drive with stitches in your hand.

If you decide not to have treatment

Sometimes your symptoms may resolve with time.

If your finger becomes stuck in a bent position and you are unable to straighten it yourself you should seek medical attention so that the joint does not become permanently stiff.

Further information

If you have any questions or concerns, please email **handsurgery@gjnh.scot.nhs.uk** or contact the orthopaedic clinic during office hours on 0141 951 5553. For out of hours, you should contact the Senior Nurse via the switchboard on 0141 951 5000.

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