

Hand therapy

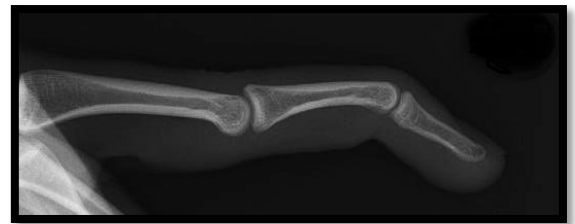
Mallet finger

Information for patients, families and carers

Introduction

What is a mallet finger?

A mallet finger is an injury to the tendon that straightens the tip of the finger, causing it to bend. Sometimes there is also a small break in the bone.



What causes a mallet finger?

Mallet finger occurs when there is an impact on the tip of the finger even if sometimes the impact appears to be minor.

What are the signs and symptoms of a mallet finger?

- you will notice that the end joint droops down
- you will find it difficult to straighten the finger at that joint
- it may also be swollen or bruised
- it may not always be painful

An X-ray should be taken to check for a break (fracture).

What treatments are available for a mallet finger?

Most mallet finger injuries are successfully treated by wearing a splint to keep the tip of the finger straight, 24 hours a day, seven days a week for:

- six weeks – if there is a break in the bone
- eight weeks – if the injury is on the tendon only

The splint should keep your fingertip straight but allow the rest of your finger to bend. It is important that the tip of your finger does not bend at all during the splinting period.

After complete and constant splinting, you will need to wear your splint for a further two weeks at night only. You will also need to wear it when your finger might be at risk of injury, for example, when you are in busy or crowded place.

In very rare cases, surgery is required. This is usually when a large piece of bone is pulled away from the main bone or where there is a deep, open wound.

What are the potential complications associated with treatment?

Mallet fingers do not tend to have a lasting impact on the hand function.

- you may experience stiffness (that is, a mild pain) when bending your fingertip for up to three to four months. This will improve with time
- it is likely that your finger will not be as straight as before, and the tip may appear larger for six to 12 months. To get the best result the splint must fit well and you must not bend the tip during the splinting period
- if you have very flexible joints your finger may have a tendency to have a different shape and this may require different splinting

What are the potential complications of **not** receiving treatment?

If you decide not to have treatment, the finger will remain in a bent or drooped position. This can cause the finger to get in the way when you put your hand in your pocket or when you are trying to open your hand to grasp objects. In some cases, people can then develop problems with the middle joint of the finger.

How long will it take to heal?

Most mallet finger injuries heal without problems with splinting. There can be a slight loss of straightening at the end joint, but this should not affect your ability to use your hand. You may:

- find that the finger is stiff when the splint is first removed
- have a small lump on the back of your finger

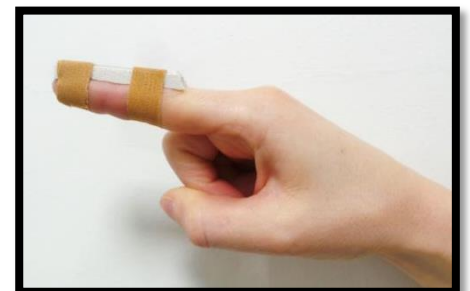
You may need to do some exercises to make the joint flexible again. Your hand therapist will tell you about the exercises and show you how to do them. It may take several months for any swelling or redness to fade.

In some cases, the tendon does not heal itself. It may be necessary to splint the end joint for a longer period or you may be referred to a hand surgeon to discuss surgery.

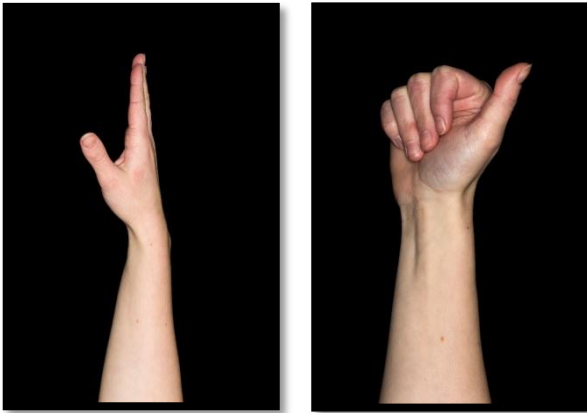
Is there anything I can do to help myself?

You must wear your splint at all times. This keeps the end joint of your finger straight. You should move the middle joint of the affected finger and ensure this does not become stiff.

- **do not** remove the splint and bend your fingertip
- **do not** do any heavy lifting or pulling as this will bend your fingertip even in the splint



To avoid stiffness and improve movement while wearing your splint, perform these exercises five to ten times, five times each day:



Where can I find more information?

Visit our website

- virtual fracture clinic: [Virtual fracture clinic | Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust](#)
- hand therapy: [Hand therapy | Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust](#)
- hand clinic: [Hand and wrist clinic | Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust](#)

Contact details

These contact details are not for urgent queries. Please allow 24 hours for a reply Monday to Friday.

Waiting to hear from us after your Emergency Department visit?

Call us on 0203 312 5552 – general virtual fracture clinic enquiries

Email: imperial.virtualfractureclinic@nhs.net

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3312 7777** (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street
London W2 1NY

Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net

Telephone: **020 3312 1337 / 1349**

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

Wi-fi

Wi-fi is available at our Trust. For more information visit our website: www.imperial.nhs.uk

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