

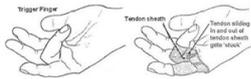


## Trigger Digit

### What is it?

Trigger finger is a condition that causes pain, stiffness, and a sensation of locking or catching when you bend and straighten your finger

When the thumb is involved, the condition is called “trigger thumb.”



### What is the cause?

In a trigger finger, the tendon that pulls the finger towards the palm when making a fist does not slide easily. In a patient with a trigger finger, the ligament (pulley) that helps hold the tendon in place can become thickened, making it harder for the flexor tendon to glide through it as the finger bends. Over time, the flexor tendon may also develop a small nodule on its surface. When the finger flexes and the nodule passes through the pulley, there is a sensation of clicking, catching or popping. This is often painful.

In a severe case of trigger finger, the finger locks and becomes stuck in a bent position. Sometimes the patient must use his or her other hand to straighten the finger

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## Who gets it?

Anyone can be affected by it;

- 2-3% of general population
- 10% of diabetic population

- ring and long fingers are most commonly involved in adults

## Cause

While the causes of trigger finger are not well known, several factors may increase your risk for developing the condition. These include:

**Associated Medical Conditions.** Trigger finger is more common in people with certain medical conditions

- Diabetes may have both hands affected or multiple digit involvement
- Amyloidosis
- Hypothyroidism
- Sarcoidosis
- Gout

**Associated orthopaedic conditions**

- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Calcific tendonitis

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### **What are the symptoms?**

Pain at the site of triggering in the palm (fingers) or on the palm surface of the thumb at the middle joint, usually in a person over the age of 40.

Tenderness if you press on the site of pain

May be able to feel a nodule

Clicking or catching of the digit during movement, or locking in a bent position, often worse on waking in the morning. The digit may need to be straightened with pressure from the opposite hand.

Stiffness, especially in trigger thumb where movement at the end joint is reduced

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### **What is the treatment?**

Trigger fingers and trigger thumb aren't harmful but can be a really painful nuisance.

Just over half of patients 52% with trigger fingers resolve without any treatment at approximately 8 months. The thumb was the most frequent digit to resolve without treatment (72%). Mckee et al 2018

The options for treatment are:

**Non operative**

**Operative**

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#### **Non operative**

Avoiding activities that cause pain, massaging the palm, if possible using anti-inflammatory creams, NSAIDs.

Using a small splint to hold the finger or thumb straight at night. A lollipop stick held on with tape can be used as a temporary splint to keep the affected joint in extension can help to prevent locking symptoms at night.

Steroid injection relieves the pain and triggering in about 90% of cases in non-diabetic patients. Improvement may occur within a few days of injection, but may take several weeks. A second injection is sometimes required, but surgery may be needed if triggering persists.

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#### **Operative**

**Percutaneous** trigger finger release with a needle. Some surgeons prefer to release the tight mouth of the tunnel using a needle under a local anaesthetic that is performed through the skin without an incision. The needle is used to break up constricting tissue around the tendon sheath. This method is not suitable for all patients and all digits.

**Open** surgical decompression of the tendon tunnel is usually performed under local anaesthesia. Unlike percutaneous a small incision in the palm of the hand is made, surgeon locates tendon sheath and carefully cuts through to make more space for the tendon. This is only indicated where at least two injections have failed. It would not be considered to be the first option for treatment.

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## For further information

Please email [ghnt.newcastlegatesheadtims@nhs.net](mailto:ghnt.newcastlegatesheadtims@nhs.net), ring on **0191 2138800** or visit our website at: [www.tims.nhs.uk](http://www.tims.nhs.uk) which provides online guidance and support on managing your musculoskeletal (MSK) condition effectively.

The NHS website also provides trusted online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare to help you manage your condition and/or inform your choices about your health: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk).

## Useful links

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can offer on-the-spot advice and information about the NHS. You can contact them on freephone **0800 032 02 02** or e-mail [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk).



### **Tyneside Integrated Musculoskeletal Service**

TIMS is a partnership between Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust

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