



TRIGGER FINGER FAQ

1) What is trigger finger?

The first sign of trigger finger is a feeling of stiffness and difficulty bending the finger. There may be swelling in the palm. Later, as the symptoms increase, the finger may “get stuck” in a bent position and have to be straightened with the help of the other hand. When the finger does move, it may snap, as it becomes “unstuck.”

2) Why does it happen?

The tendon that bends the finger passes through a tendon sheath, much like a tunnel. If the tendon becomes enlarged by inflammation, it cannot pass through this tunnel freely. A nodule, or bump, may form on the tendon making it even more difficult for the tendon to glide and causing stiffness and pain. A small sling lies beneath each finger joint. When the nodule must pass under this sling, it may stop or stick. It can be compared to trying to pass thread that has a knot in it through the eye of a needle.

3) What causes the tendon to be inflamed?

Repetitive use of the hands may make trigger finger worse, but it has not been proven to be a cause of the inflammation. The cause is not certain, though it is most common in middle-aged women. Diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis may increase the chance of getting a trigger finger.

4) What can be done to help?

With a mild case, simply resting the finger may relieve the symptoms. Grasping and other painful activities should be avoided. A splint can be used to keep the tendon at rest. Wearing the splint and avoiding grasping for 7 to 10 days may be enough to relieve the symptoms.

If the symptoms are more severe and the finger is frequently getting “stuck”, a physician may recommend a steroid injection. The steroid can decrease the inflammation and therefore, the size of the tendon and nodule. This allows the tendon to move through the sheath more freely.

5) What about surgery?

Surgery is recommended when injections and conservative treatments fail to relieve symptoms. In surgery, a small incision is made in the palm. The sling is cut to allow the tendon to glide. The incision will be covered with a dressing for a few days. Full, comfortable motion is allowed. It is important during this recovery time to elevate the hand as much as possible to decrease swelling. There will be a scar on the palm. This can be softened and made more comfortable by massage. Recovery from trigger finger surgery usually takes only a few weeks.