



Trauma and Orthopaedics

Trigger finger (or trigger thumb)

What is Trigger Finger?

Trigger finger affects the movement of your tendons which connect the muscles in your forearm to the fingers and thumb. The tendons in the fingers and thumb run in a sheath. This is an outer covering designed to lubricate the tendon and allow movement with minimal friction. The tendon also runs through a series of tunnels called pulleys, which keep it close to the bone at all times as it moves.

In trigger finger, the smooth running of the tendon is damaged. The sheath and/or pulley becomes thick, and the tendon may develop a nodule inside it. The tendon nodule may become stuck within the tunnel, particularly on waking and when bending and straightening the finger. Trigger finger usually affects the thumb, middle or ring finger. More than one finger can be affected, and it may develop in both hands.

Who develops it?

It can occur in men and women usually in middle-age, but all age groups may develop the condition. Certain conditions (e.g. diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis) increase the risk of this.

Treatment

Treatment depends upon the severity of your symptoms and how long you have had them.



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Injection

Injection of a steroid into the sheath of the tendon can help some people. Not all people respond to an injection and for some the benefit may only be temporary. It is recommended you do not drive immediately after an injection, and all finger rings must be removed from the hand / finger being injected.

Surgery

A small operation to free the finger or thumb that is triggering or may have become locked, can be performed as a day-case procedure under a local anaesthetic. The surgeon gives you a local anaesthetic with one or two injections into the hand then a small wound is made over the site of the nodule; the tunnel is cut to allow free gliding of the tendon. A tourniquet may be used on the upper arm to prevent bleeding during the surgery. This can feel uncomfortable, but is usually only inflated for 15 minutes. Stitches are removed in 10 -14 days; these are usually removed at your GP practice. The hand will be heavily bandaged for the first two to three days after which free movement is allowed.

What are the possible complications?

- The scar may be sensitive and tender but generally this usually settles down within a few weeks.
- The finger or thumb may also develop stiffness after the surgery, but this usually responds to hand therapy.
- A very small number of people develop infection, persistent pain, stiffness or swelling in the hand.
- Infection can be treated with antibiotics, but sometimes require further surgery.
- Recurrence is rare.

How long will I be off work and when can I drive?

It is your responsibility to make sure you are safe to drive. You can discuss this further with your treating clinician if you remain unsure. Please consider bringing someone with you, to avoid having to drive home yourself immediately after any procedure. You may wish to consider

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waiting until you can grip the steering wheel tightly without any distracting pain, before resuming driving.

Returning to work will depend on your type of job: light or desk-based jobs may be possibly at 2-3 weeks, but resumption of heavy manual labour may require up to 6-8 weeks. You should be able to perform most everyday activities with any splints or strapping that may have been provided. Again, please speak to your treating clinician about this, and do not resume sporting activities until you are told that it is safe to do so.

Further information

The day surgery unit can be contacted on 024 7696 6861 / 024 7696 6868 (University Hospital), or on 01788 663264 (Hospital of St. Cross). For further information please contact:

- Our plaster room technicians at Hospital of St. Cross on 01788 669143
- Our plaster room technicians at University Hospital Coventry on 024 76 96 6909
- Our specialist hand surgery nurse / hand-coordinator on 024 7696 5072
- Hand Therapy at University Hospital Coventry & Warwickshire on 024 76 96 6016
- Hand Therapy at Hospital of St. Cross, Rugby on 01788 663257

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 7696 6861 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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