

**Patient
Information**

Mallet finger

Introduction

This leaflet provides information for patients who have a mallet finger injury.

What is a mallet finger?

A mallet finger affects the joint closest to the end of the finger. Usually, you are unable to straighten your finger tip, unless you push the joint straight with your other hand. Mallet finger is caused by an injury to the tendon or a small break to the bone where the tendon attaches. If left untreated, it is likely that your joint will stay bent for the rest of your life.

Treatment

Mallet fingers are treated by using a splint which keeps the end joint of the finger completely straight, while the injured tendon or fracture heals. This usually takes 6 to 8 weeks. During this time, the splint should only be removed for skin hygiene – you must keep the finger clean and dry while wearing the splint.

It is important to keep the splint on unless you have been shown how to remove it safely. Please remember the injured joint **must not be allowed to bend at all**.

With the splint securely in place, you may use your hand as normal. Before driving, check with your insurance company that wearing the splint will not affect your cover. If at any point the splint is uncomfortable, not holding the fingertip straight or the skin becomes broken or sore, please contact your local physiotherapy department to arrange a splint review.

Exercises to do while wearing the splint

While wearing the splint it is important to move all of the other joints in your hand regularly. The end joint of your injured finger should not be bent until the period of continuous splinting has been completed (usually 6 to 8 weeks).

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Department

Emergency

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Exercises to do when splinting has been removed

The splint should be worn at night for a further 2 weeks after the continuous splinting has ended.

Once you are allowed to remove the splint during the daytime, the following exercise can be performed.

Gently bend the end joint of the injured finger to an angle of 20° to 30° then straighten it fully. You should do this 20 times each hour during the day. This exercise is more effective if the middle joint of your injured finger is held straight with your other hand. The amount you bend the end joint can be gradually increased over the next few weeks until the finger is moving normally again.

If the end joint of the finger returns to a bent position and cannot straighten by itself when removing the splint, then the splint should be worn continuously for a further 2 weeks. Please contact the department where the splint was fitted for advice if you are unsure whether or not to continue full-time splint use.

The simple exercise described will help you to regain the movement in your finger after the splint is removed.

Summary

Mallet fingers normally recover well with splinting, although you may be left with a slight deformity of the finger.

If the splint is removed earlier than advised, it is unlikely that the finger will straighten by itself in the future.

Contact information

Trauma Clinic

Cheltenham General Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 3863

Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5:00pm

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 8408

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm

Patient Information

Physiotherapy Department

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 8527

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 4:00pm

Physiotherapy Department

Cheltenham General Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 3040

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 4:00pm

Further information

More information about mallet finger is available on the following websites:

Patient

Website: www.patient.info/health/mallet-finger

NHS

Website: www.nhs.uk/conditions/mallet-finger/

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Making a choice

Shared Decision Making

If you are asked to make a choice, you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends. It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment.



Ask 3 Questions

To begin with, try to make sure you get the answers to three key questions if you are asked to make a choice about your healthcare.

1. What are my options?
2. What are the pros and cons of each option for me?
3. How do I get support to help me make a decision that is right for me?

These resources have been adapted with kind permission from the MAGIC Programme, supported by the Health Foundation

* Ask 3 Questions is based on Shepherd HL, et al. Three questions that patients can ask to improve the quality of information physicians give about treatment options: A cross-over trial. Patient Education and Counselling, 2011;34: 379-85



<https://aqua.nhs.uk/resources/shared-decision-making-case-studies/>