Trigger Finger

Understanding symptoms, causes and recovery

Trigger Finger (Stenosing Tenosynovitis)

A guide to symptoms, treatment and exercises



What is trigger finger?

A finger or thumb may become painful or stiff, catch in a bent position, or straighten suddenly with a click or snap.

Why does it happen?

Swelling or irritation of a tendon or its sheath can prevent smooth gliding and cause triggering or locking.

Symptoms and diagnosis

Recognising trigger finger and factors that may contribute

Stiffness and tenderness

Finger or thumb stiffness, especially in the morning, and pain at the base of the digit on the palm side.

Clicking, catching or locking

The finger may click or pop with movement, catch in a bent position or suddenly straighten.

Grip difficulties

Grip strength may decrease. Symptoms can range from mild to severe and may come and go.

Who is more likely to be affected?

Trigger finger is more common at ages 40–60, with diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis, after strain, or with repetitive gripping.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is usually based on symptoms and physical examination. Scans or X-rays are rarely needed.

Activity modification

Reduce forceful or repetitive gripping and take regular breaks from hand-intensive activities.

Important information

Seek medical advice if the finger becomes permanently locked, pain worsens, or swelling and redness develop.

Exercises and rehabilitation

Gentle movements to support finger mobility

Finger tendon-gliding exercise examples

Move slowly within comfort. A physiotherapist can advise which exercises are appropriate for your symptoms.

Trigger Finger – Exercise Examples

Gentle exercises to improve finger movement and reduce symptoms

Exercise guidance

Perform these exercises gently and regularly. Repeat each exercise 5–10 times, 2–3 times per day.
Stop or modify exercises if pain increases.

1 Tabletop



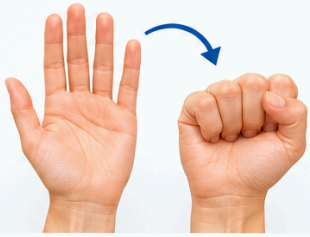
- Make a "table-top" position with your fingers.
- Keep your finger joints straight and bend only at the knuckles (middle joints).
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Repeat 5–10 times.

2 Hook fist



- Make a hook fist as shown.
- Keep the top finger joints straight.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Repeat 5–10 times.

3 Straight fist



- Start with your fingers straight.
- Slowly bend your fingers to touch your palm, keeping your thumb relaxed.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Repeat 5–10 times.

4 Full fist



- Make a complete fist as shown.
- Hold for 5 seconds.
- Gently open your hand back up to straight fingers.
- Repeat 5–10 times.

Key points

- Do exercises regularly.
- Build up gradually as movement improves.
- Some discomfort is normal, but exercises should not increase pain.
- Seek advice from your GP or physiotherapist if symptoms persist or worsen.

Exercise safety

Exercise gently and stop if triggering, pain or swelling increases. Follow the repetitions and progression advised by your clinician.

Treatment and management

Practical measures, treatment options and when to seek help

1. Self-care and cold packs

Reduce aggravating activities and take breaks. A wrapped cold pack for 10–15 minutes may ease discomfort.

2. Exercises and splinting

Gentle finger movement may maintain mobility. A splint worn at night or during activities may reduce triggering.

3. Pain relief

Paracetamol or anti-inflammatory medicines may help if suitable. Ask a pharmacist or clinician for advice.

4. Steroid injection

A corticosteroid injection into the tendon sheath can reduce inflammation and help many people.

5. Surgery, if needed

Persistent symptoms despite other treatments may be treated with a small procedure to release the tight tendon sheath.

Important information - when to seek help

Contact your GP if pain or locking worsens, the finger remains locked, redness or swelling increases, or symptoms do not improve.

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