

**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 happens when the joint closest to the end of the finger cannot straighten by itself (although you may still be able to push the joint straight with your other hand). It is caused by injury to the tendon that straightens the fingertip or a fracture to the bone where the tendon joins. If left untreated, it is likely that your joint will remain bent.

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 if you have been shown how to do this safely. The finger should be kept dry in the splint.

If the splint is in place and you keep your finger dry you may use your hand as normal. Before driving, it is advisable to 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 the other joints in your hand. The end joint of your injured finger should not be bent until the period of continuous splinting has come to an end (usually 6 to 8 weeks).

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Exercises to do when full-time splinting has ended

The splint should then be worn at night for a further 2 weeks.

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, 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 on 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 exercises described above 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

Orthopaedic Outpatient Department

Cheltenham General Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 3147

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

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 8408

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

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Physiotherapy Department
Gloucestershire Royal Hospital
Tel: 0300 422 8527

Therapy Department
Cheltenham General Hospital
Tel: 0300 422 3040

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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