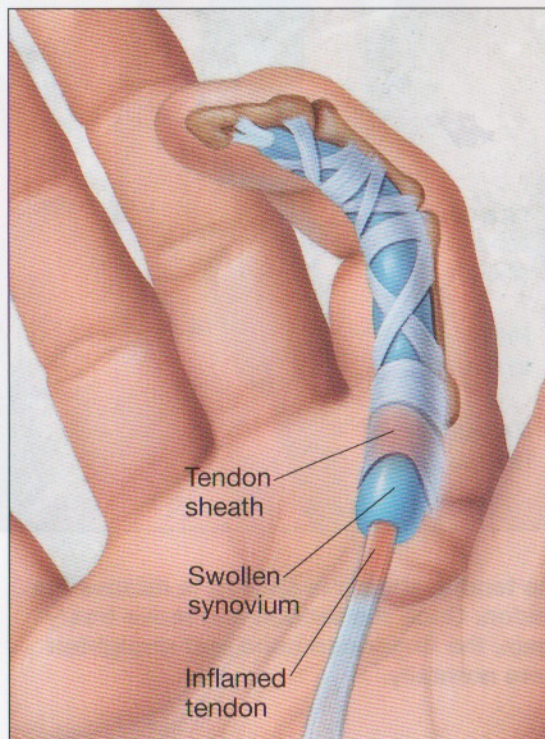


Inside Your Finger

Tendons connect muscles in your forearm to the bones in your fingers. The tendons in each finger are surrounded by a protective tendon sheath. This sheath is lined with synovium, which produces a fluid that allows the tendons to slide easily when you bend and straighten your finger. If a tendon is irritated, it becomes inflamed.

When a Tendon Is Inflamed

An inflamed tendon will cause the lining of the tendon sheath to swell and thicken. Or, the tendon itself may thicken. Then the sheath pinches the tendon, and the tendon can no longer slide easily inside the sheath. When you straighten your finger, the tendon sticks, catches, or “triggers” as it tries to squeeze back through the sheath.



Using Your Finger Again

The goal of treatment is to relieve pain and swelling and to allow you to straighten your finger or thumb again. Once the tendon is no longer inflamed, your doctor may prescribe exercises to help you regain movement in your finger or thumb. You may also need to make changes in the way you hold or lift things. Following these directions will help you get back to your normal activities.



This brochure is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Only your doctor can diagnose and treat a medical problem.

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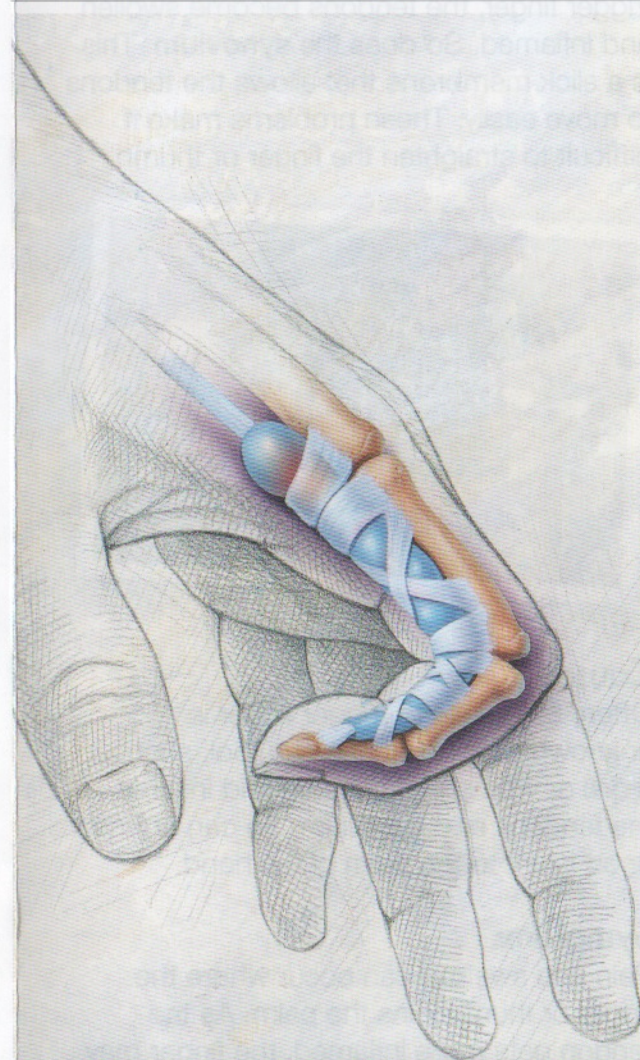
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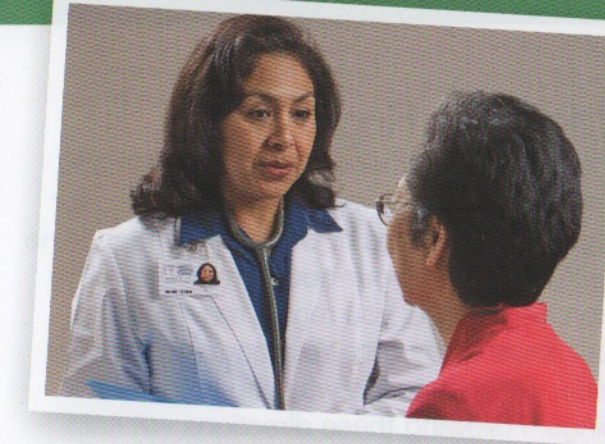
TRIGGER FINGER



Restoring Movement
in Your Finger or Thumb

What Is Trigger Finger?

Trigger finger (also called **tenosynovitis**) affects the tendons inside the finger or thumb. **Tendons** are cordlike fibers that attach muscle to bone. They allow you to bend and straighten your fingers. With trigger finger, the tendons become swollen and inflamed. So does the **synovium**. This is a slick membrane that allows the tendons to move easily. These problems make it difficult to straighten the finger or thumb.



Diagnosing and Treating Trigger Finger

Your doctor can usually tell from examining your finger or thumb whether a tendon is inflamed. Treatment will depend on the severity of your condition. Work with your doctor to understand your options. Be sure to get answers to any questions you have.

Evaluating Your Finger

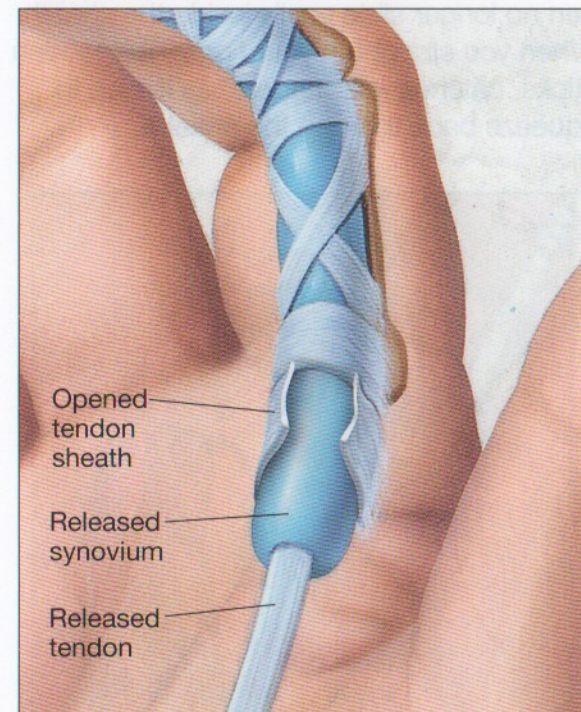
You will be asked to make a fist and then straighten your fingers. The affected finger or thumb may stay curled and then suddenly pop to a straight position. Or, you may have to straighten it with your other hand. The doctor may check the base of your finger or thumb for tenderness and swelling.

Nonsurgical Treatment

Mild symptoms are often treated by resting the finger and taking anti-inflammatory medication, such as ibuprofen or naproxen. Your doctor may also recommend injections of a stronger anti-inflammatory, such as cortisone, in the base of the finger or thumb. This treatment can further reduce swelling.

Surgery

If other treatments fail to relieve your symptoms, surgery may be recommended. The sheath that surrounds the tendon is opened to enlarge the space and release the swollen tendon. This allows the finger or thumb to bend and straighten again. Surgery can often be done under a local anesthetic. You will likely go home the same day. Your hand will be bandaged, and you may need to wear a splint for a short time. The stitches will be removed in 1 to 2 weeks. Your doctor will discuss the benefits and risks of the surgery with you.



The tendon sheath is opened to release the tendon. Once the tendon can move freely again, the finger can bend and straighten more normally.

Causes

Often, the cause of trigger finger is unknown. Repeated use of a tool, such as a drill or wrench, can irritate and inflame the tendons and synovium. So can arthritis or an injury to the palm of the hand.

Symptoms

Pain and swelling can occur where the finger or thumb joins the palm. As the tendon gets more inflamed, the finger may catch when straightened. When the locked tendon releases, the finger jumps, as if releasing the trigger of a gun. This further irritates the tendon and may set up a cycle of catching and swelling.