

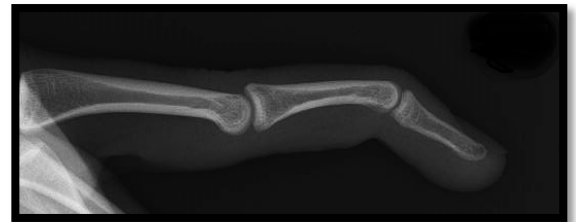
Virtual fracture clinic

# Mallet finger

## Information for patients, families and carers

### What is a mallet finger?

A mallet injury is a tear to the tendon that straightens the end joint of the finger. Sometimes a small piece of bone breaks off with the tendon.



### What causes a mallet finger?

Mallet finger can occur during sport, when the end of the finger contacts a ball or other object with great force. It can also be caused by pulling up socks, while making the bed or if there is a deep cut to the finger over the end joint.

### What are the signs and symptoms of a mallet finger?

If you have a mallet finger you may notice that the end joint droops down and you will find it difficult to straighten the finger at that joint. It may also be swollen or bruised. It may not always be painful.

An x-ray should be taken to check for a fracture (break).

### What are the treatments available for a mallet finger?

Most mallet finger injuries are successfully treated by wearing a splint to keep the tip of the finger straight, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for:

- six weeks - if the tendon has torn with a small piece of bone attached
- eight weeks - if only the tendon is torn
- **do not bend your finger during the splinting period**
- **always support your finger on a table if you need to take the splint off**

After constant splinting, you will need to wear your splint for a further two weeks at night, and when your finger might be at risk of injury, like when you are in busy and crowded places.

However, please be aware that mallet finger injuries with a large fracture or an open wound may require surgical treatment.

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## What are the potential complications associated with treatment?

Occasionally the end joint of the finger can become stiff after being held straight for a prolonged period. This will normally resolve once you start doing exercises.

## What are the potential complications of not receiving treatment?

If you decide not to receive treatment for your mallet finger you should be aware that it will always remain in a bent or drooped position.

This can cause the finger to get in the way when you put your hand in your pocket or when you are trying to open your hand to grasp objects. In some cases people can then develop problems with the middle joint of the finger.

## What is the usual outcome after a mallet finger?

Most mallet finger injuries heal without problems with splinting. There can be a slight loss of straightening at the end joint but this should not affect your ability to use your hand.

You may find that the finger is stiff when the splint is first removed. You may need to do some exercises to regain the flexibility in that joint. Your hand therapist will tell you about the exercises and show you how to do them. It may take several months for any swelling or redness to fade. And you may have a small lump on the back of your finger.

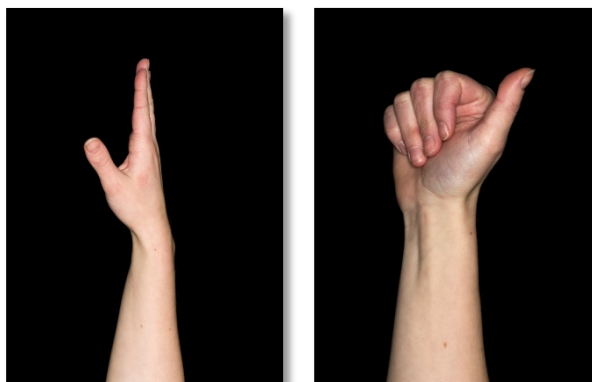
In some cases, the tendon does not heal itself. It may be necessary to splint the end joint for a longer period or you may be referred to a hand surgeon to discuss surgical options.

## Is there anything I can do to help myself?

It is important that you wear your splint to keep the end joint of the finger straight at all times in the first stage of your recovery. **Do not remove the splint to “test” the tendon.**

You should move the middle joint of the affected finger and ensure this does not become stiff. You should try to use your hand as normally as possible with the splint on. **Do not** do any heavy lifting or pulling.

To avoid stiffness and to optimise the return of movement whilst wearing your splint, perform the exercises below five to ten times, five times each day:



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## Who can I contact for more information?

Please look at our website which has educational material for patients and professionals

[www.londonvirtualfractureclinic.co.uk](http://www.londonvirtualfractureclinic.co.uk)

Please note the phone line is open **Wednesday mornings** only.

**From:** 9:00am to 11:00am

**Please call:** 02033125990

**Or email:** [VirtualFractureClinic@imperial.nhs.uk](mailto:VirtualFractureClinic@imperial.nhs.uk)

### **To speak to someone about hand therapy appointments**

Please telephone 0203311 0333

## How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at [pals@imperial.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@imperial.nhs.uk). The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to express your concerns in **writing** to:

Complaints department  
Fourth floor  
Salton House  
St Mary's Hospital  
Praed Street  
London W2 1NY