

Patient Information for Consent

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OS36 Trigger Finger Release

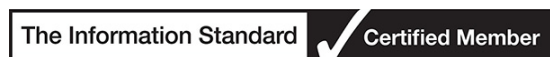
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What is trigger finger?

Trigger finger is a condition where your finger jams or gets stiff, or straightens with a painful snap. It can also affect your thumb.

Your surgeon has recommended an operation called a trigger finger release. However, it is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not.

This document will give you information about the benefits and risks to help you to make an informed decision. If you have any questions that this document does not answer, ask your surgeon or the healthcare team.

How does trigger finger happen?

The tendons that bend your fingers usually glide freely through tight tunnels made by flexor tendon pulleys attached to bones in your hand. If the fibrous wall of a tunnel thickens, the tunnel becomes too tight, usually resulting in your finger jamming in a bent position (see figure 1).

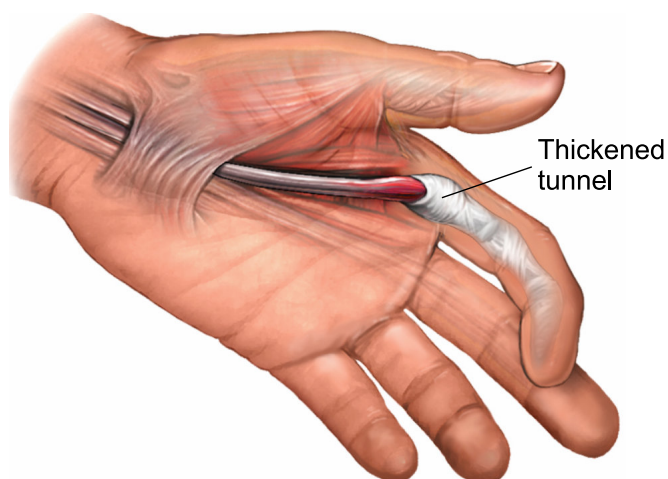


Figure 1
Trigger finger

Trigger finger is more common in women and in people with medical problems such as rheumatoid arthritis, diabetes or thyroid disease. However, for most people there is no particular cause.

What are the benefits of surgery?

The aim is to allow your finger to move freely.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

A steroid injection into the base of your finger can treat the problem in up to 6 in 10 people. However, you may need more than one injection.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

Symptoms may improve if there is an underlying cause that is treated.

If treatment with steroid injections has failed, you will probably not be able to move your finger normally and your finger may continue to jam or be stiff. Sometimes your finger may jam and not release even when you pull it.

If your finger is permanently jammed and you do not have any treatment for a long time, a trigger finger release may not be able to put right the damage already done.

What does the operation involve?

Remove any rings from your hand before you come into hospital.

The healthcare team will carry out a number of checks to make sure you have the operation you came in for and on the correct finger. You can help by confirming to your surgeon and the healthcare team your name and the operation you are having.

The operation can usually be performed under a local anaesthetic and usually takes about 20 minutes.

Your surgeon may use a tourniquet (tight strap) to reduce bleeding. This helps your surgeon to see important structures, such as nerves, while they perform the operation.

Your surgeon will make a small cut on the palm of your hand at the base of your finger. They will cut open the roof of the fibrous tunnel that is causing the trigger finger (see figure 2). This allows the tendon to glide freely through the tunnel.

Your surgeon will close your skin with stitches.

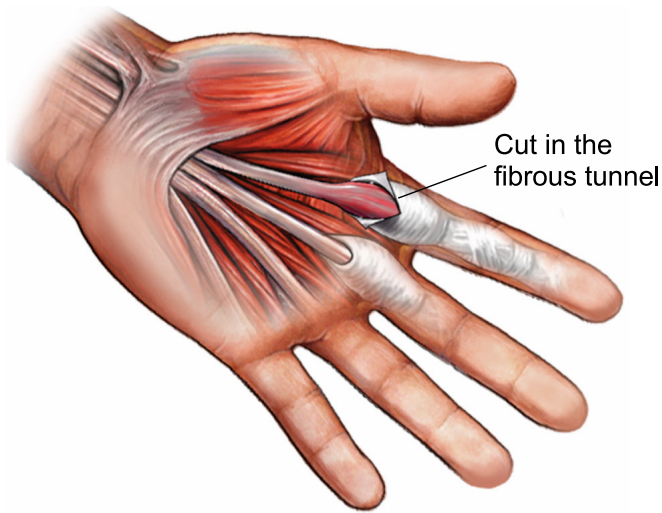


Figure 2
A trigger finger release

What should I do about my medication?

Let your doctor know about all the medication you take and follow their advice. This includes all blood-thinning medication as well as herbal and complementary remedies, dietary supplements, and medication you can buy over the counter.

What can I do to help make the operation a success?

If you smoke, stopping smoking several weeks or more before the operation may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

You can reduce your risk of infection in a surgical wound by having a bath or shower either the day before or on the day of the operation.

What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to make the operation as safe as possible but complications can happen. Some of these can be serious. You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand. Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

Your anaesthetist or surgeon will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

General complications of any operation

- Pain. The healthcare team will give you medication to control the pain.
- Bleeding during or after the operation. The risk is reduced because your surgeon will usually use a tourniquet. Any bleeding usually settles if you keep your hand raised above your heart but you may need another operation if the bleeding continues.
- Infection of the surgical site (wound). It is usually safe to shower after 2 days if you keep your wound dry and covered. Let the healthcare team know if you get a high temperature, notice pus in your wound, or if your wound becomes red, sore or painful. An infection usually settles with antibiotics.
- Scarring of your skin. However, the scar usually becomes almost invisible over time.

Specific complications of this operation

- Numbness in your finger caused by damage to a nerve. This can be permanent (risk: less than 1 in 100).
- Tenderness of the scar (risk: 5 in 100). This usually gets better but can be a permanent problem.
- Bowstringing, where damage to the tendon prevents you from fully straightening your finger. You may need another operation to repair the tendon.
- Severe pain, stiffness and loss of use of your hand (complex regional pain syndrome). The cause is not known. You may need further treatment including painkillers and physiotherapy. Your hand can take months or years to improve. Sometimes there is permanent finger stiffness.

How soon will I recover?

In hospital

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area and then to the ward. You will have a bandage on your hand and may need to wear a sling.

You should be able to go home the same day. However, your doctor may recommend that you stay a little longer.

If you do go home the same day, a responsible adult should take you home in a car or taxi and stay with you for at least 24 hours. Be near a telephone in case of an emergency.

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, contact the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

Returning to normal activities

Do not drive, operate machinery or do any potentially dangerous activities (this includes cooking) for at least 24 hours and not until you have fully recovered feeling, movement and co-ordination.

If you had a general anaesthetic or sedation, you should also not sign legal documents or drink alcohol for at least 24 hours.

Your surgeon will tell you when you can return to normal activities.

Do not put any rings on for at least the first 2 days and not until any swelling has settled.

Keep your hand raised and bandaged for 2 days. It is important to gently exercise your fingers, elbow and shoulder to prevent stiffness.

After 2 days the dressing can be reduced but keep your wound clean and dry until any stitches are removed.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Do not drive until you are confident about controlling your vehicle and always check your insurance policy and with your doctor.

The future

For 8 in 10 people, symptoms improve quickly. If your finger was stiff before the operation, it can take several months before you can move your finger normally.

The operation is a success in 9 in 10 people.

Summary

Trigger finger is a condition where your finger jams or gets stiff. If treatment with steroid injections has failed, surgery should allow your finger to move freely.

Surgery is usually safe and effective but complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you to make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Acknowledgements

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