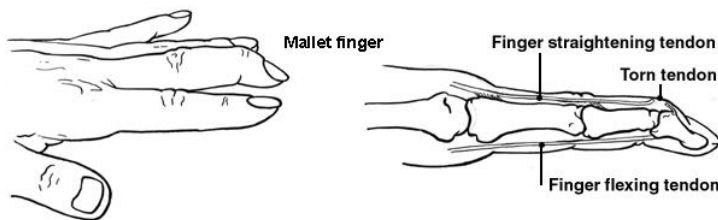


What is mallet finger?

Mallet finger is where the finger bends but will not straighten by itself. The usual cause is an injury to the end of the finger. It is a relatively common injury which tears the tendon that straightens (extends) the end of the finger. The joint can be pushed straight but will not hold that position on its own. Mallet finger can be very painful and the joint can become very red and swollen.



Mallet finger is often caused by contact sports but also can be caused by something as simple as making a bed. You can also injure your tendon by cutting your finger.



Sometimes, the injury causes a small fragment of bone to be pulled off.

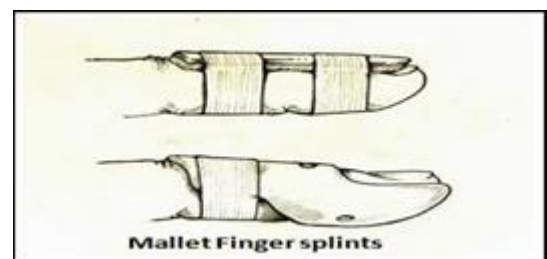
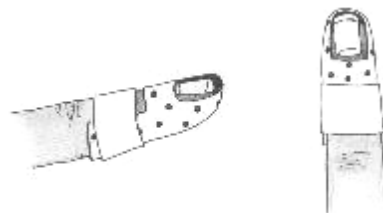


Treatment

Usually the doctors will allow the tendon heal by itself. A mallet splint is applied to keep the finger straight with the end joint bent backwards slightly (overextended). This will bring the two damaged tendon ends virtually together.

The splint must be worn at all times, day and night for 6-8 weeks to allow the tendon healing to be strong enough to start allowing a little bit of movement. It is essential that the finger is kept absolutely straight for the whole 8 weeks. This is very frustrating, but if the finger is allowed to droop during that period then the tendon repair will be pulled apart and you go back to 'square one'. The tendon may stretch and the finger tip will stay permanently drooped.

It may take several months for your finger to regain function properly at the end. Any redness, swelling and tenderness of your skin over the end of your finger may persist for the first few months after the injury. These symptoms will usually improve eventually.



Precautions

When worn continuously the splint can cause maceration and infection of the skin. It is important to follow the care guidelines to help prevent these problems occurring.

[continued]

Care of your mallet splint

1. Remove the splint each morning and evening
2. Carefully slide the splint off your finger. Keep the finger absolutely straight by pressing the finger tip down on a flat surface e.g. the edge of the hand basin to prevent the finger tip from drooping
3. Wash and dry the skin thoroughly. You can assist the drying by using methylated spirits
4. Dry the splint thoroughly. Replace the splint ensuring that your finger tip is right up to the end of the splint. You may wish to use powder to help the splint slide on
5. Tape the splint securely in place
6. If your hands have become wet during the day, you will need to remove your splint and dry both your fingertip and the splint as per steps 2-5 above

What happens if I do not have treatment?

Without any treatment, the appearance and ability to straighten the end joint of the finger will not improve. If the injury is less than a month old, the problem may become worse by using the finger without a protective splint.

If the injury is more than three months old and has not been treated, it is unlikely that it will get better or worse on its own. Injuries more than three months old are not likely to be improved without surgery.

Follow-up appointments

It is important that you return for your follow-up appointments at the Orthopaedic clinic. There will be several appointments before you are discharged from the clinic.

Contact us:

Remember If your child does not have an appointment, always phone before coming to Orthopaedic clinic.

Wellington Hospital Orthopaedic Clinic

Phone (04) 385 5952 Fax (04) 385 5953

Hours of opening: Monday – Friday (excluding Public Holidays) 8am - 5.30pm

Outside of these hours please contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department
Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

Kenepuru Hospital Outpatients

Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 7205

Hours of opening: Monday – Friday (excluding Public Holidays) 8am - 5pm

Outside of these hours please contact the Wellington Hospital Emergency Department
Phone (04) 385 5999 Ext 5432

Can't keep your outpatient appointment?

Please phone us on 0800 999 442 and let us know as soon as possible.