



Trigger Finger

About your condition

This handout describes the cause, symptoms, diagnosis, and treatment of trigger finger.

What is trigger finger?

Trigger finger, also called *tenosynovitis*, involves the *pulley* and *tendons* in the hand that help bend the fingers. The tendons work like long ropes connecting the muscles of the forearm with the bones of the fingers and thumb. In the fingers, the pulleys are a series of rings that form a tunnel through which the tendons must glide, much like the guides on a fishing rod through which the line (or tendon) must pass. These pulleys hold the tendons close against the bone. The tendons and the tunnel have a slick lining that allows easy gliding of the tendon through the pulleys.

Trigger finger/thumb occurs when the pulley at the base of the finger or thumb becomes too thick and constricting around the tendon, making it hard for the tendon to move freely through the pulley. Sometimes the tendon develops a nodule (knot) or swelling of its lining. Because of the increased resistance to the gliding of the tendon through the pulley, one may feel pain, popping, or a catching feeling in the finger or thumb (also known as triggering).

When the tendon catches, it produces inflammation and more swelling, causing a cycle of continued triggering, inflammation, and swelling. Sometimes the finger becomes stuck or locked, and is hard to straighten or bend.

What causes it?

The cause of trigger finger is not always clear. Some trigger fingers are associated with medical conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, gout, and diabetes. Local trauma to the palm or base of the finger may be a factor at times.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Trigger finger/thumb may start with discomfort felt at the base of the finger or thumb, where they join the palm. This area is often tender to local pressure. A nodule may sometimes be found in this area. When the finger begins to trigger or lock, the patient may think the problem is at the middle knuckle of the finger or the tip knuckle of the thumb, since the tendon that is sticking is the one that moves these joints.

Questions?

Call 206-598-4263

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns. UWMC clinic staff are also available to help at any time during clinic hours.

Hand Center:
206-598-HAND (4263)

Treatment Options

Our goal in treating the trigger finger/thumb is to eliminate the catching or locking and allow full movement of the finger or thumb without discomfort. Swelling around the flexor tendon and tendon sheath must be reduced to allow smooth gliding of the tendon.

Non-surgical treatment

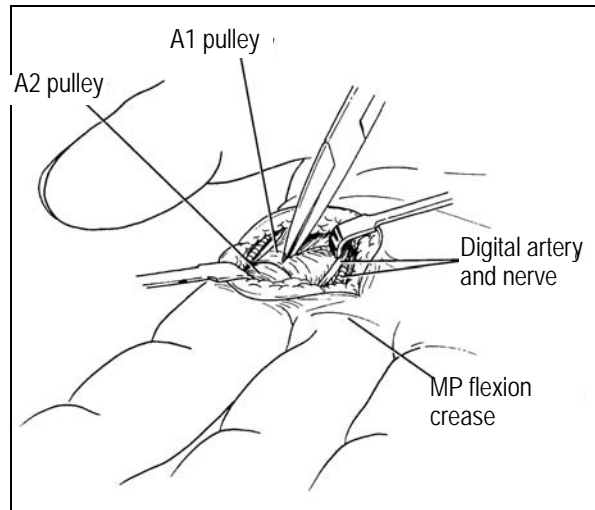
An injection of steroid into the area around the tendon and pulley is often effective in relieving the trigger finger or thumb.

Surgical treatment

If symptoms persist, surgery may be recommended. The surgery is an outpatient procedure that opens the pulley at the base of the finger so that the tendon can glide more freely.

Care After Surgery

Active motion of the finger generally begins right away after surgery. Some patients may feel tenderness, discomfort, and swelling around the area of their surgery. At the clinic visit 2 weeks after surgery, your stitches will be removed and you can slowly return to normal activities.



Surgery for trigger finger.

Reference: *Principles of Hand Surgery and Therapy* by Thomas E. Trumble, M.D., W.B. Saunders, 2000.

Visit www.orthop.washington.edu To learn more about trigger finger or thumb.

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