

TRIGGER FINGERS

Do you have catching of one or more of your fingers upon gripping and grasping type activities? Is this associated with pain at the base of your finger?

Do you awaken in the morning with a finger locked down in the flexed position?

If so, you may have what is called a “trigger finger”.

The tendons going to your fingers slide through a protective covering called the tendon sheath. This sheath keeps the tendons next to the bones and helps the tendons to slide easily, resulting in bending of your fingers.

A trigger finger is often caused by inflammation or swelling of the tissues about the tendons. It may also result in enlargement of the tendon itself. When the tissues about the tendon are inflamed or the tendon is enlarged, the tendon has difficulty sliding freely through the sheath. The tendon may bind up or catch as it goes through the pulleys. This can result in locking of the finger, which at times may require forceful straightening of the finger. This condition is often associated with tenderness in the palm at the base of the affected finger.

The exact cause of trigger fingers is not always readily apparent. It may be associated with strain in the area due to aggressive work or hobby activities. Tasks that require repetitive gripping and grasping may irritate the tendon and cause such a condition to occur. The symptoms of trigger finger may also be associated with conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, gout, diabetes or other metabolic disorders.

Conservative (non-operative) treatment to this problem is an appropriate first step unless the finger is locked in an unmovable position. The initial treatment oftentimes consists of a cortisone and local anesthetic injection into the affected tendon sheath. Splinting of the finger, particularly at night, to prevent locking can also be helpful. Oral anti-inflammatory medications such as ibuprofen or Tylenol can additionally help to reduce the inflammation.

If non-operative treatment options do not bring satisfactory resolve of the symptoms, it is often recommended that a trigger finger release be performed. This is a relatively simple procedure that is performed under local anesthetic on an outpatient basis. The surgery involves releasing a portion of the tendon sheath preventing binding of the tendon. A small incision in the palm is utilized to perform this release. Following surgery a light dressing is applied to protect the wound, which is removed several days later. Activities requiring use of the affected hand may be restricted for four to six weeks.