

# Mallet Finger

## What has happened?

A mallet finger injury is a tear of the tendon that straightens the end joint of the finger. The tendon may tear where it joins on to the end bone of the finger - or it may pull off small fragment of bone at this point (in which case it is called a mallet fracture). Occasionally the injury is the result of the tendon being completely divided because of a deep cut.

## What are the symptoms?

- Pain and swelling over the end of the finger
- Inability to straighten out the joint at the end of the finger (known as a **mallet deformity**)

## What is the treatment?

The injury is usually treated in a mallet splint. This splint keeps the end joint of the finger straight, whilst allowing movement of the middle finger joint. This allows the 2 ends of the snapped tendon to heal together over the course of around 6-8 weeks.

## What should I expect during recovery?

The finger needs to be splinted for at least 6 weeks, and during this time the finger should be kept straight when the splint is changed (see opposite).

The finger swelling and pain should settle within 2-3 weeks, and it is important to use the rest of the hand as normally as possible to avoid stiffness.

At 6 weeks, it is safe to start moving the finger. If the fingertip starts to droop, then the splint should be re-applied for a further 2 weeks before re-commencing the exercises.

## Are there any complications of this injury?

The most common complication of this injury is a persistent mallet deformity. This does not affect function, but can be a nuisance.

Occasionally, the tendon fails to heal, leaving a significant deformity with or without pain. Surgery to fuse the bones of the fingertip is sometimes recommended if this happens, but satisfaction rates following surgery are poor, and it is usually safer to live with the problem.

## What does the Xray look like?



Most injuries do not have a fracture

## Managing your splint

To wash your finger you must keep your finger straight and use the support of a table. If the tip of the finger bends down during the first few weeks of treatment, the healing process can be disrupted.



## TOP TIPS

- Keep the splint clean and dry
- Watch out for pressure related skin problems or skin breakdown in the splint
- Stop smoking – smoking slows the healing process
- Get in touch if you have any issues with your splint

## Contact the Fife Virtual Hand Clinic Team

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