

Trigger Finger/Thumb

What is it?

Trigger finger involves pulleys and tendons in the hand that bend the fingers. The tendons work like long ropes connecting the muscles of the forearm with the bones of the fingers and thumb. The tendons glide through pulleys, similar to the way a fishing line glides through the guides on a fishing rod. The pulleys hold the tendons close against the bone. The tendons have a slippery lining that allows the tendon to glide easily through the pulleys (see Figure 1).

Trigger finger/thumb occurs when the pulley at the base of the finger becomes too thick and constricting around the tendon. Sometimes the lining of the tendon also develops a nodule (knot) or swelling. This makes it difficult for the tendon to move freely. Someone with this condition may feel pain, popping or a catching feeling in the finger or thumb (see Figure 2). When the tendon catches, it produces inflammation and more swelling. Sometimes the finger becomes stuck or locked, and is hard to straighten or bend.

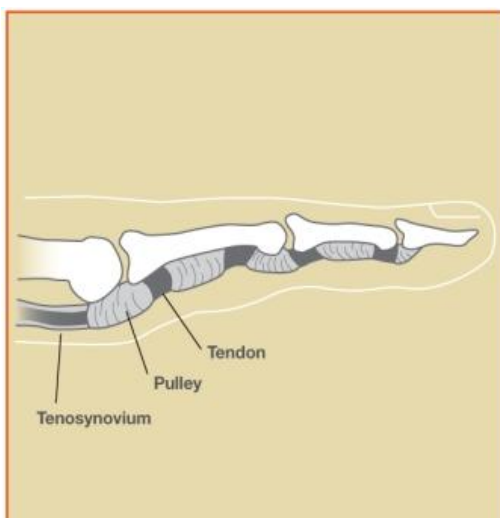


Figure 1: Unaffected finger

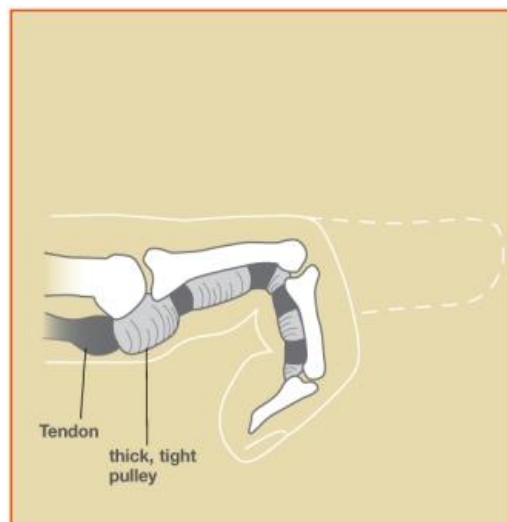


Figure 2: Affected finger showing the tendon catching on a thick, tight pulley. Sometimes the tendon will be enlarged and thicker

What causes trigger finger / thumb?

Causes for this condition are not always clear. Some trigger fingers are associated with medical conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, gout, or diabetes. Damage to the palm / base of the finger or overuse can also be factors.

Signs and symptoms of trigger finger / thumb

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 touch. A nodule may sometimes be felt in this area. When the finger begins to trigger or lock, it may seem as though the problem is at the middle knuckle of the finger or the tip knuckle of the thumb. This is because the tendon catching is the one that moves these joints.

Treatment

Changing the way you use your hands

Certain activities can increase your symptoms. Ways that you could reduce the impact of these activities include:

1. Reducing duration, frequency and/or force required to complete tasks:
 - »» Take regular breaks during heavier or repetitive tasks
 - »» Consider other ways that a task can be completed
 - »» Alternate heavier tasks with lighter tasks

2. Avoid gripping for long periods or repeatedly:
 - »» Loosen your grip and change your position regularly when doing things such as reading a book, talking on the phone, pushing a shopping trolley or sweeping/mopping.
 - »» Use equipment/tools/cutlery with thicker handles as this requires less force to hold.

Wearing a splint

This will be discussed by your therapist.

Please contact your therapist if you would like more information or if you have any queries or concerns.

Therapist: _____

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