

Relief for Painful Hands

Repetitive movements and forceful use of hands is often the cause of trigger finger and trigger thumb.

Is the base of your finger or thumb tender? Is your finger or thumb joint stiff? Does your finger or your thumb sometimes snap or lock in a bent position?

Trigger finger or trigger thumb are painful conditions that cause fingers or thumbs to catch or lock in a bent position. It's often caused by repetitive movements or vigorous use of fingers or thumbs

“The condition often first appears as stiffness in the finger joint, or tenderness at the base of the finger. As the condition worsens the finger may actually catch in a bent position and eventually snap straight, or it may not fully straighten at all,” said Orthopedic Hand Surgeon Pamela Jones, MD.

Virtually anyone in an occupation that makes them use their hands, fingers and thumbs forcefully or repetitively are prone to trigger finger or trigger thumb. The condition is more common in women, and most common in those ages 40 to 60.

“Medical conditions that cause changes in tissues can also be a factor; individuals with rheumatoid arthritis, gout, or diabetes can be at higher risk,” said Orthopedic Hand Surgeon Richard Choi, MD

Trigger finger or thumb happens when tendons become inflamed. Tendons are tough bands of tissue at the end of muscles where they attach to bone.

“Lubricating membranes that surround joints help tendons glide through the sheaths that cover them. When a tendon becomes inflamed, it doesn't glide easily through the narrowed tendon sheath, making the finger or thumb get stuck in a bent position,” said Orthopedic Hand Surgeon Crawford Campbell, MD.

Trigger finger and trigger thumb can be worse after resting and loosen up with movement.

Trigger finger and trigger thumb are diagnosed with a physical exam, and discussion of work-related and medical risk



Orthopedic Hand Surgeon Joshua Philbrick examines a young woman's hand for a condition known as trigger finger.

factors. Physicians listen to concerns, and look for a finger that may be swollen, stiff, painful, or locked in a bent position. A tell-tale sign can be a bump in the palm of the hand.

To treat trigger finger, the first step is often to simply rest the affected hand, and splint the affected finger or thumb to limit movement. Wearing a simple strap made of a coban wrap or a Band-aid on the middle joint of the triggering finger or thumb for two to four weeks can also be helpful.

“If symptoms continue, anti-inflammatory drugs may be prescribed, and injection of a steroid, such as cortisone, into the tendon sheath can be beneficial. If it does not get better, surgery to release the tendon may be recommended,” said Orthopedic Hand Surgeon Joshua Philbrick, MD.

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