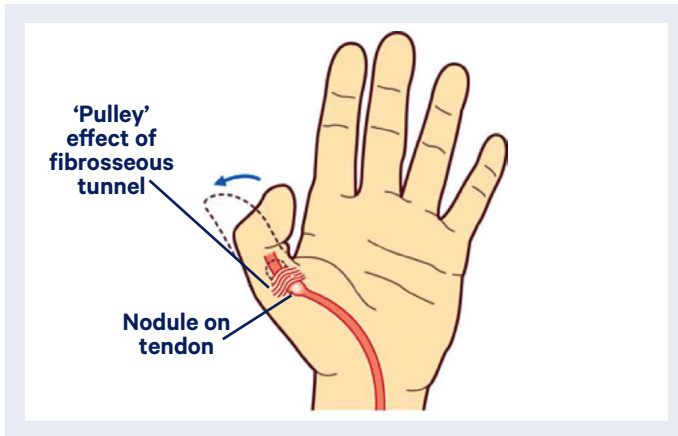


Trigger Thumb

WHAT IS A TRIGGER THUMB AND HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

Trigger thumb is a condition that causes the thumb to catch or lock after it has been bent.



In your hand there are bands of tissues called tendons that connect the muscles in your arm to your thumb bones. Together the muscles and tendons bend and straighten your thumb. The tendons normally move through a protective covering called a tendon sheath. If a part of the tendon becomes swollen it may glide through the tendon sheath when bending the thumb but become stuck or caught at the opening of the sheath when straightening the thumb. This can make the thumb click or pop as it straightens and is sometimes painful.

The name trigger thumb is used because when the thumb unlocks, it pops back suddenly, as if releasing a trigger on a gun.

Trigger thumb can be caused by injury to the bottom of your thumb or palm, strong or repetitive pinch gripping, or swelling in the tendon caused by medical conditions like diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, heart failure and carpal tunnel syndrome.

HOW IS TRIGGER THUMB TREATED?

Hand Therapy

Your hand therapist will assess your finger and treatment may include

- A splint to wear for 3-6 weeks. This allows the tendon to move but not trigger.
- Exercises to help the tendon move without triggering.
- Ice or heat to the area to help reduce swelling.
- Discussing ways to change activities that involve lots of gripping or gripping for a long time.
- A referral for a cortisone injection if the triggering keeps happening.

Corticosteroid Injection

If symptoms don't settle your hand therapist may refer you for a corticosteroid injection. This puts a strong anti-inflammatory medicine into the tendon sheath to help reduce the swelling and pain. Your hand therapist can refer you to a doctor for a corticosteroid injection and will see you after the procedure to continue your rehabilitation.

Surgery

Surgery is considered when the problem does not get better using the splint or if you have severe locking of the thumb (you are unable to straighten it at all). The surgeon makes a small incision in your palm under a local anaesthetic. The tendon sheath is released to allow the tendon to glide freely.



WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM MY REHABILITATION?

You should wear your splint for 4-6 weeks and avoid everyday tasks that you know make your symptoms worse. If your symptoms improve you will begin to spend less time in your splint. At first you can remove your splint when you are resting, then progress to doing lighter tasks around the house without the splint and lastly for all normal activity without your splint. This can take a further 6 weeks.

Your hand therapist will show you exercises to keep the joints in the finger moving and safely glide the tendon.

If you have had no change in your symptoms your hand therapist can refer you for an ultrasound scan to look at the tendons, or for a corticosteroid injection or surgical opinion.

If you do have an injection or surgery you can expect to use your hand normally again within 6 weeks. Your hand therapist will guide your rehabilitation after an injection or surgery.

Do

- Remember to wear your splint.
- Avoid or modify the activities that bring on your symptoms.
- Rest between activities, especially if you are doing anything heavy or repetitive.

Do Not

- Do lots of forceful gripping at one time.



Trigger Thumb

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK OUT FOR?

- Look for activity that causes pain or swelling in your hand or thumb. Try to avoid the activity and tell your hand therapist.
- If your splint is uncomfortable book an appointment to see your hand therapist.
- If your symptoms are getting worse book an appointment to see your hand therapist.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I DO NOT HAVE TREATMENT?

In most cases the pain and swelling will get worse with time and become much harder to treat. This will affect you in everyday tasks. Your thumb could become permanently stuck in a bent position. Treatment is more effective if started within the first few months of symptoms.

CONTACT DETAILS AND REFERENCES

Your hand therapist is

Merivale Hand Clinic (03) 3559775

<http://www.assh.org/handcare>

<http://www.bssh.ac.uk/patients>