

Mallet finger

Information for patients



What are mallet finger injuries?

Mallet finger injuries are caused by damage to the tendon, or the bony attachment of the tendon, which normally allows you to straighten the tip of your finger. As a result of the injury, the fingertip droops.

Treatment

The aim of treatment is to return your fingertip to as near normal a position as possible. This will take at least 6-8 weeks. However, success cannot be guaranteed.

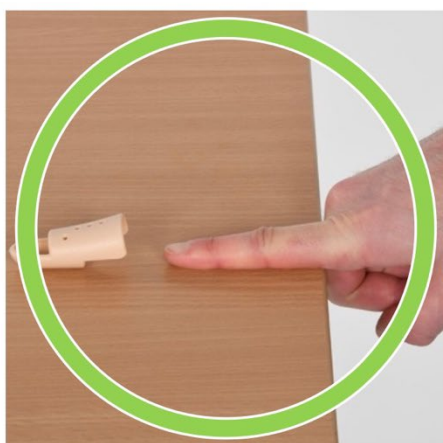
We will apply a splint to your fingertip to hold it slightly bent beyond its usual position (hyperextension). It's essential to look after your splints to achieve a good result. If your finger droops at any time it may be necessary to start the splinting process again from the beginning.

The splint will be held on by tape, which may cause problems with your circulation if applied too tightly. If you find the splint is no longer holding your fingertip up as well as before please contact the team who applied your splint, whether that's the Emergency Department, Minor Injuries Clinic or Hand clinic.

. Splint should be worn 24-hours-a-day for 6 - 8 weeks, depending on the type of injury. Please, do not remove the splint for showering or washing. If the splint gets wet, it should be removed as shown below, and the skin and splint should be dried to avoid maceration of skin.

Getting your finger wet may cause the tape to loosen, and may also make your skin sore (as may wearing waterproof gloves for long periods). If you get the splint wet, it **must** be removed, dried and reapplied.

When removing the splint to dry the skin the finger joints should be maintained in extension (straight) to avoid drooping of the finger and loss of position (see pictures below).



You must regularly move your knuckle on the affected finger, and other unsplinted joints, while wearing the splint, otherwise the finger will become very stiff. This is then hard to treat, so prevention is best.



After 6-8 weeks the splint can be removed during the day but should still be used overnight, and during sports, for further two weeks.

What to expect after treatment

The finger joint will be stiff on removal of the splint at 6-8 weeks. **Please do NOT actively force the joint to bend** as this will risk tearing the tendon again.

The area of injury, the joint and around the base of the nail may be tender for many months after the injury, and may also be red in colour. A small lump may form at the area of injury. This is scarring tissue and is normal.

Despite the best treatment you may still end up with an extensor lag at the joint, which means that the finger will continue to droop at the end. This is very common after removal of the splint and does not mean that your treatment has failed. Rather, it is that the tendon was probably stretched at the time of injury and hasn't stuck back down to exactly where it was torn off from. You are unlikely to have any functional issues with the finger being a little bent at the end, and it is quite safe to leave it alone.

If you feel your finger is drooping a lot after you remove the splint and start moving it, then you can try a second period of splinting for a further 6 weeks. This will make the joint at the end of the finger stiffer, and there is no guarantee that the droop will be any better.

It is highly unlikely that any sort of surgical treatment will be offered in the case of a drooping joint. The brain becomes adapted to having a joint that bends but doesn't straighten all the way. The hand functions much better with a finger that bends into a fist, rather than one that sticks out straight permanently.

The hand surgeons at the Hooper Hand Unit recommend that you try to get used to the new position of the finger for 6 months before considering whether you feel you need any significant intervention for your finger.

