

## Mallet finger

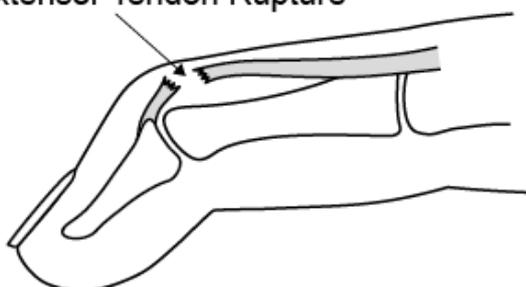
### Other formats

If you need this information in another format such as audio CD, Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, please contact the PALS desk on 01271 314090 or at [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net).

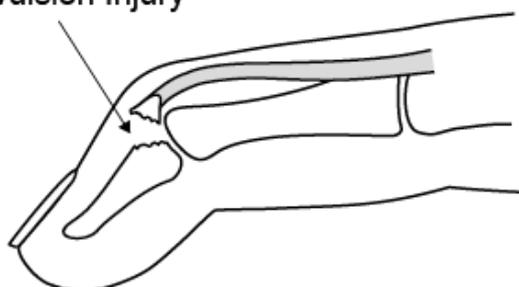
### What is mallet finger?

You have injured the tendon that straightens the tip of your finger. This is known as a mallet injury. It occurs when the tendon ruptures (soft tissue or tendinous mallet) or when the tendon pulls off a small piece of bone (bony mallet or bony avulsion injury). The tendon will take six to eight weeks to heal but will not be strong for 3 months.

Extensor Tendon Rupture



Avulsion Injury



### How is it treated?

To treat this, the end joint must be held straight in a splint for eight to twelve weeks so the tendon/bone can heal. It is very important that the middle finger joint is not splinted and is encouraged to move fully whilst the end joint is splinted. This allows the tendon to lengthen back to its original position. Bones heal quicker than tendons so the overall time is shorter (eight weeks) if you have a fracture.

Bony mallet injuries may need surgery if the joint is dislocated whilst wearing the splint. All bony mallet injuries will be followed up in the emergency clinic and referred to a surgeon if required, or to the hand therapists if not dislocated. Non bony mallet injuries will be managed by the hand therapists throughout. If the tendon has not fully healed after the initial splinting period, you may be advised to wear the splint for another few weeks.

About 90% of all mallet injuries will heal with this treatment but a small number of patients may need further treatment if the initial management is not successful.



If the end joint of the finger is allowed to bend during this time, healing will not occur and the finger droop will be permanent. The splint should therefore only be taken off for cleaning your finger **whilst keeping the finger straight**.

## Splint

Whilst the tendon is healing it is important that you wear a splint which keeps the end joint of your finger straight at all times to allow the tendon/bone to heal. The tip of your finger must be kept supported whilst the tendon is healing. Whilst you are changing the tape your joint must not be left to drop. If the end joint drops, the weak scar tissue healing the tendon will break, and your splintage will need to start again from day one.

## Hygiene

Whilst wearing your splint your finger/splint needs to be kept dry. If it does get wet, the water will get trapped, causing skin problems. Your skin will become white and macerated, and over time will begin breaking down. You will need to keep your hand dry whilst bathing or showering. Taping a plastic bag over your hand can be helpful at keeping your finger dry. Using gloves whilst washing the dishes may also be necessary.

If you accidentally get your finger wet whilst wearing the splint, or the finger needs cleaning, the splint should be removed (**whilst keeping the finger straight**), your splint and finger dried, and then your splint taped back on.

## Dos and Don'ts

### Please do not

- Try to examine the healing by bending the finger tip.
- Wear any rings on this hand until the injured finger has healed. This will help avoid swelling and circulatory problems.

### Do

- Keep your hand elevated for the first 3-5 days
- Exercise all the joints except the splinted joint.
- Keep your clinic and hand therapy appointments.

## Further information

If you have any questions or concerns about your finger, please contact the emergency department (A&E) on 01271 322480 or your GP.

## **PALS**

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern call 01271 314090 or email [ndht.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ndht.pals@nhs.net). You can also visit the PALS and Information Centre in person at North Devon District Hospital, Barnstaple.

## **Have your say**

Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust aims to provide high quality services. However, please tell us when something could be improved. If you have a comment or compliment about a service or treatment, please raise your comments with a member of staff or the PALS team in the first instance.

'Care Opinion' comments forms are on all wards or online at [www.careopinion.org.uk](http://www.careopinion.org.uk).

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