

Caring for a bony mallet finger injury

Emergency Department

Information for Patients

Produced: June 2025

Review: June 2028

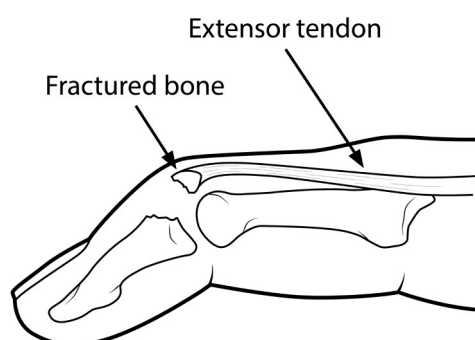
Leaflet number: 1621 Version: 1

What is a bony mallet finger injury ?

A bony mallet injury happens when the end joint of your finger gets hurt. This makes it hard to straighten the tip of your finger, and it might droop at the end. This happens when a piece of bone breaks (fractures) at the point where the tendon attaches.

Tendons are cord like structures, that connect muscles to bone. So when the tendon is attached to a piece of bone that has been pulled away, it cannot work and means you cannot lift the tip of your finger on it's own.

If your injury is not treated, you may not be able to straighten the tip of that finger in the future and it will be permanently drooped.

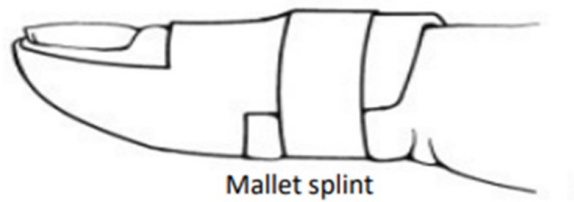


How is it treated?

To treat this, the end joint of your finger must be held straight in a splint for **6** weeks all the time, then after this time for **2** weeks at night only so the bone can heal.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

Visit www.leicestershospitals.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk



All bony mallet injuries will be followed up by the fracture clinic. The fracture clinic will send you a letter in the post explaining your follow up plans. If you have not heard from them by 2 weeks please contact them on: 0116 258 5430.

Finger care

While wearing your splint your finger needs to be kept dry. If it does get wet, the water will get trapped. This can damage the skin. If the finger is left wet, your skin will become white and over time will break down causing a wound.

- You will need to keep your hand dry when bathing or showering.
- Taping and covering your hand with a plastic bag can be helpful. Do not leave it for a long time as the hand will sweat.
- Using gloves while washing dishes may also help.
- If you accidentally get your finger wet, follow the finger cleaning instructions below.
- Keep your nails short so they do not catch on the splint.
- Do not try to examine the healing of your finger by bending the finger tip until you have been advised you can start moving the finger.
- Do not wear any rings on this hand until the injured finger has healed. This will help avoid swelling and the rings getting too tight.
- You may need some simple pain killers, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen. There is further advice in the pain relief leaflet. To access the leaflet search: 'Taking pain relief for an injury after discharge from the Emergency Department'.
- It is important that the middle finger joint is not splinted so it can still move while the end joint is splinted. This allows the tendon to lengthen back to it's normal position.
- It is also important to move your other finger joints so they do not become stiff.

How do I clean my finger?

You need to put your hand flat on a table palm side down while cleaning the finger. This is to make sure you do not bend the end joint and delay healing.

1. Remove the tape.
2. Slide the splint off keeping your finger flat on the table.

3. Clean the finger with whatever products you use.
4. Dry the finger thoroughly, keeping the finger flat on the table.
5. Reapply the spare splint, slide it on with your hand flat on the table. The tip of the finger must be right at the end of the splint and it positions your finger correctly.
6. Wash the splint you have just taken off in soap and water and let it dry thoroughly.

Swelling

You may have swelling in your finger after injury. This is quite normal.

Keep your hand raised above heart level for the first 72 hours (3 days) as much as you can. You can do this by resting your hand across your chest/ shoulder, using pillows, or a sling if you have one.

Use ice around the splinted finger. Wrap the ice in a tea towel to avoid burning or wetting the skin. Do this for the first 72 hours. This will reduce swelling . Apply it every 3 hours for 10 minutes.

Try to avoid walking with your hand hanging down at your side for long periods, as this will make it swell more. Try to avoid this in the first few weeks if possible. You can use a sling if you have one, if not try to shorten the amount of time you hand is hanging, by changing the position of your arm.

What problems could I have?

- Sometimes the tape may cause some skin irritation. If this happens, we recommend changing the tape to micropore (paper style tape) available at most chemists.
- If you notice any red areas where the splint may be rubbing, or have concerns about the condition of the skin, or the splint is too loose or tight contact the fracture clinic 0116 258 5430 for further advice.
- Avoiding smoking as this can delay healing. Find help to stop here: www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/nhs-stop-smoking-services-help-you-quit/
- Occasionally you may be left with a slight deformity or loss of the ability to straighten your finger-tip fully and slight stiffness at the end joint of your finger, compared with your other fingers. If this is the case usually physiotherapy can help improve the function of the finger, but the finger may be like this permanently.

Exercises

- Exercise 1 and 2 can be completed while you are in your splint.
- Then when the splint has been removed complete all of the exercises.

Exercise 1:

1. With your other hand hold your finger just below the crease of the middle joint. This will stop the bottom joint from moving.
2. Bend the middle joint of your finger as far as you can. Then straighten it back up. Make sure you are also straightening the finger fully at the end.
3. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds. Repeat 10 times 3 times a day.

**Exercise 2:**

1. Keeping the fingers straight, bend at just the knuckles.
2. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds. Repeat 10 times 3 times a day.

**Exercise 3:**

1. Bend all 3 finger joints into your palm (into a fist). You may need to use your other hand to help if the joints are stiff.
2. Let go and straighten the fingers back. Make sure you are also straightening fully at the end.
3. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds. Repeat 10 times 3 times a day.

**Exercise 4:**

1. Hold your injured finger in a hook shape. You may need to use your other hand to help if the joints are stiff.
2. Then straighten it back. Make sure you are also straightening the finger fully at the end. Hold for 10 to 20 seconds. Repeat 10 times 3 times a day.

**Contact details**

Fracture Clinic (Leicester Royal Infirmary Balmoral building, level 1)

Problems with your injury: 0116 258 5430. Appointments: 0116 258 5138.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغة أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

Previous reference:

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email equality@uhl-tr.nhs.uk