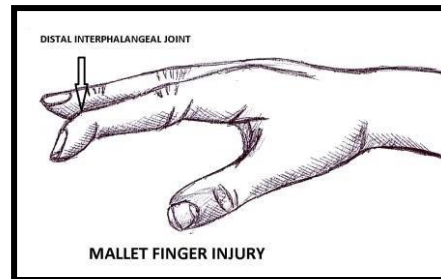


Mallet Injury

This leaflet provides information about mallet injuries. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the hand therapist in charge of your care.

What is a mallet injury?

A mallet finger / thumb injury is when the tendon that straightens the tip of the finger or thumb (the extensor tendon) is damaged and is no longer attached to the end (distal) bone of the finger.



What are the signs and symptoms?

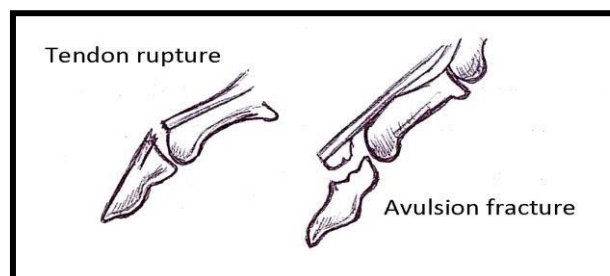
You may not be able to straighten the end joint of your finger or thumb without help.

Do I need any tests to confirm the diagnosis?

You may require an x-ray to confirm if the bone has broken as well as the tendon being damaged.

A mallet injury happens when a trauma to your finger or thumb either tears the fibres of the extensor tendon (a tendinous injury) or fractures the bone at the point where the tendon connects to the end of the bone (avulsion injury).

Both injuries stop you from being able to straighten the tip of your finger or thumb.



What treatments are available?

Treatment aims to restore the ability to straighten the tip joint of the finger or thumb. By keeping the tip joint still for a period in a splint, the injured tendon (and bone, if needed) can heal. If you do not get treatment for a mallet injury, the end joint of the finger / thumb will remain dropped and unable to straighten. It will not heal on its own.

How do I manage my mallet injury?

Splint: A splint will be made for you to hold the end joint of your finger / thumb in extension (straight).

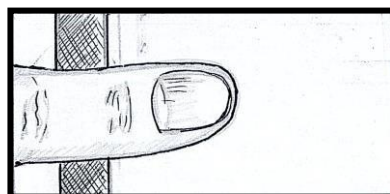
- The finger / thumb will need to always stay in the splint for the next ___ weeks for the tendon to heal.
- If the splint does not fit, please contact your hand therapist as soon as possible.
- Do not try to alter the splint yourself.
- You must always keep the splint dry. Your hand therapist will suggest techniques for keeping it dry.
- For hygiene reasons, the splint needs to be changed every five to seven days. If your finger / thumb and splint get wet, change the splint as soon as possible.

Bending the end joint of your finger / thumb can result in the tendon re-snapping. This means that you will have to start the splinting treatment again.

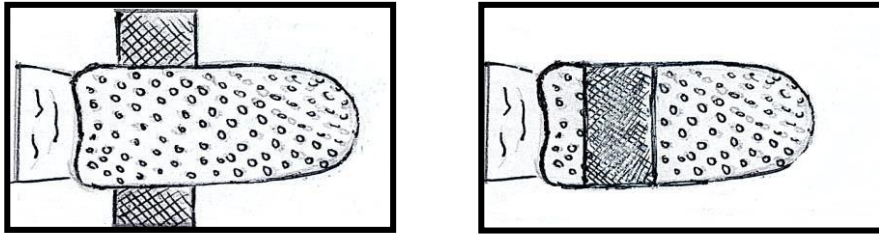
How do I change the splint at home?

It is easier to re-apply the splint with the help of someone else. This reduces the risk of bending (and re-injuring) your finger / thumb.

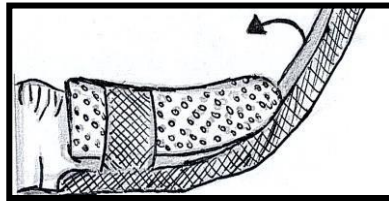
1. Cut five to six pieces of Leukotape (provided by the hand therapy department), attaching four to the side of the table and placing the fifth on the table, sticky side up.
2. Remove the current tape and splint – cut along the side of the splint. Keep the pad of your finger / thumb in contact with the table as you carefully remove the splint. **Do not let the tip of the finger / thumb bend.**
3. Remove all the tape from the splint and clean both sides with a wet wipe. You will need another person to do this.
4. Clean the top of the finger / thumb with a wet wipe. Carefully hold the tip joint straight and lift the finger / thumb off the table to clean underneath.
5. Place your finger / thumb down on the tape just below the crease of your middle joint.



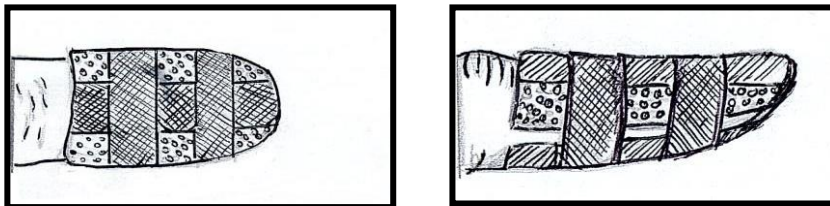
6. Place the splint over the top of the finger / thumb and secure the tape.



7. Keeping the tip of your finger / thumb supported, secure a longitudinal piece of tape underneath the finger / thumb and pull it over the tip to attach it to the back of the splint. Repeat this step.



8. Finally, place a second horizontal strip of tape just below the first to secure it in place. Make sure the tape does not restrict you bending the middle joint of your finger / thumb.



If you are having difficulty changing your splint at home, please book an earlier appointment with your hand therapist.

Exercises

It is important that the unaffected joints do not get stiff (especially the middle joint of the finger / thumb).

1. Straighten all your fingers / thumb as much as you can.
2. With your palm facing up, gently bend your fingers / thumb into the palm. You should bend only the middle joints. Do not try to bend the end joint of your injured finger / thumb in the splint.

How long will it take to heal?

Depending on the type of injury you have had, you will need to use the splint full time for the next six to eight weeks and in some clinical cases the splint may need to be worn for even longer. After this time your therapist will assess your finger to determine if the tendon is healed enough to commence gentle movement out of the splint.

You will still need to use your splint for a period to protect the tendon from further damage or injury; your therapist will advise you on this.

Most mallet injuries heal without any problems but it may take several months to regain full movement and function in the finger / thumb. Redness, swelling and tenderness of the skin around the tip joint of the finger / thumb are common for at least three to four months post injury, however this discomfort should settle with time.

Longer term, you may find that your finger / thumb does not completely straighten or you may be left with a small bump on the back of the tip joint of your finger / thumb. This is a normal outcome for this type of injury and will not affect the function of your hand in the longer term.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about regarding your mallet finger, please talk to your therapist at your next appointment.

Your therapist's name is: _____

Treatment enquiries: 020 8725 1038 (answer phone only)

Appointments: 020 8725 0007

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk



Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. **Web:** www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones. **Tel:** 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



Reference: THE_MFI_04 **Published:** June 2023 **Review date:** June 2025