



What is a Mallet Finger?

A mallet finger is a deformity that arises when the tendon that straightens your fingertip is damaged. This typically happens when a ball or other object strikes the end of the finger, causing a hyperflexion (bending) injury. The force of the blow may either tear the tendon itself, or the tendon will pull away a piece of bone where it usually attaches.

Any event causing forced flexion to the fingertip may cause this injury



How are they diagnosed?

The classic feature is a 'drooping' fingertip, that you are unable to straighten. In the acute setting there may also be swelling and tenderness. An X-ray will reveal if there is an associated fracture in the bone (if the tendon has pulled away a piece of bone).

How are they treated?

The majority of these injuries can be treated without an operation, in a splint. The splint holds the fingertip straight, and it is important to wear this for roughly 6 weeks. The goal is to hold the fingertip still until the tendon and/or bone heal – any bending during this time can impede the healing process significantly. Thus, if taking the splint off to clean the hand, the fingertip must be held straight with your thumb or the other hand. It is important to keep moving the middle joint of the finger – and your surgeon or hand therapist will educate you in this regard.

Surgical treatment may be recommended if there is a large bony fragment or the joint is falling out of position ("subluxing"). In these cases pins through the skin, or small screws or plates, can be used to realign the bone and/or the joint.

What can I expect?

Regardless of what treatment is required, most patients will notice a slight reduction in the range of motion at the fingertip. It may always have a very slight droop, or be mildly stiff in bending. This is typically not of functional consequence to the patient. There may also be a bony lump where the healing has taken place on the back of the joint. Your surgeon will discuss the specific risks that pertain to your individual situation.

