



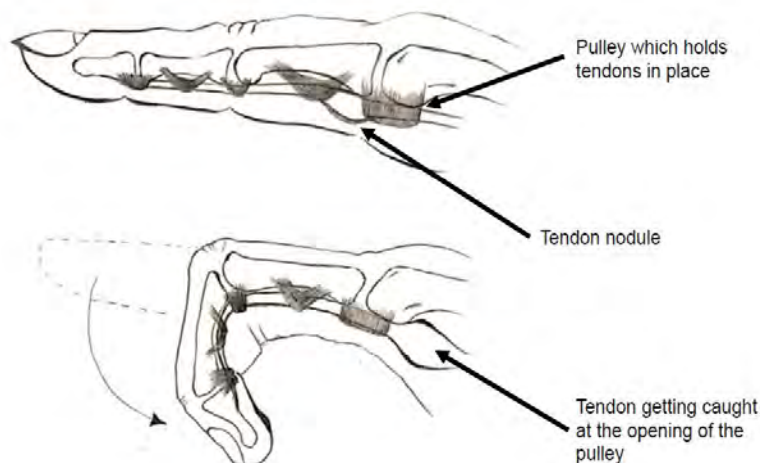
# Trigger finger treatment options

**You have been diagnosed with trigger finger (or thumb). This leaflet explains what the condition is, outlines treatment options, including surgery, and gives advice and exercises to help you recover.**

## What is trigger finger?

It is a painful condition in which a finger or thumb clicks when it is bending or straightening; sometimes, it can also lock.

Trigger finger occurs if there is a problem with the tendon or sheath, (the thin layer of tissue surrounding the tendon), such as swelling. This sometimes means the tendon can no longer slide easily through the sheath's pulley system and it can become bunched up to form a nodule. This makes it harder to bend the affected finger or thumb. The tendon gets caught in the opening of the pulley and the finger can click painfully as it is straightened.



## What are tendons?

Tendons are white, fibrous cords that join muscle to bone. They allow the bone to move when the muscle contracts. In the fingers, tendons run along the surface of the bone and are attached to the muscles in the forearm. The tendons are held in place on the bones by a series of ligaments (strong bands of tissue) called pulleys. These are shaped like arches over the tendon, keeping it along the bone. The pulleys combine to form a tunnel, or sheath, along the surface of the bone, through which the tendons slide.

## What symptoms does trigger finger cause?

- Clicking of the finger/thumb during movement, or locking in a bent or straight position.
- A nodule (small lump) can be felt at the base of the affected finger.
- Tenderness when you press on the site of nodule.
- Stiffness, especially in trigger thumb, where movement at the end joint is reduced.

## How is trigger finger treated?

Trigger finger is not harmful but can be painful. Some mild cases recover over a few weeks by modifying or avoiding activities that cause the trigger (this will be individual to each person). Other options for treatment include steroid injections and, if these don't help, surgery.

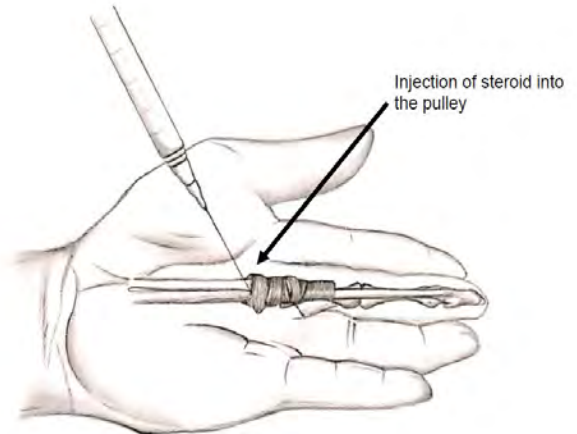
## Can exercise help?

There are no specific exercises that you need to do. As long as you keep your finger moving this will prevent stiffness and loss of hand function. However, if your finger is locked in a bent position and you are unable to straighten it, you should seek urgent medical help.

## Steroid injections

Steroid injections have been found to relieve the pain and triggering in about 70% of cases.

**The risks of injection** are small, but it very occasionally causes a temporary increase in pain (steroid flare), bruising, bleeding and infection. Improvement may occur within a few days of injection but may take several weeks. A second injection is sometimes helpful, but surgery may be needed if triggering persists.



## Surgery

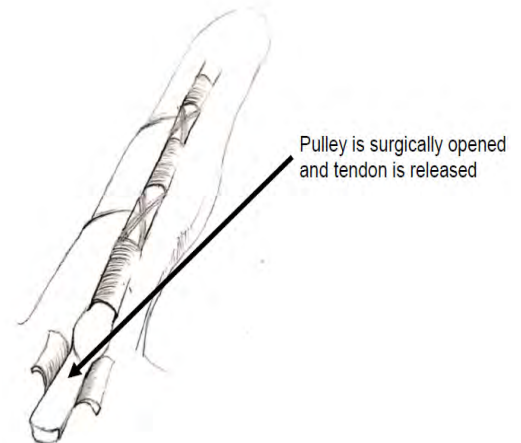
If non-surgical methods to improve your trigger finger / thumb don't help, your consultant or a member of his / her team may recommend an operation. This would be a day case procedure.

## What does surgery involve?

The operation is usually done under local anaesthetic (you are awake but the area is numbed).

An incision is made at the base of the finger and the pulley is released to allow the tendon to move freely. This is done as a day case (you go home the same day).

The doctor will explain the procedure to you and will go through the risks and benefits of the operation before you give your consent to go ahead with surgery.



## Possible complications following surgery

In rare circumstances, the wound can become infected. The symptoms of infection are a lot of discharge, pain, redness around the wound and loss of hand function. If you have any of these symptoms, go to your nearest emergency department (A&E) to seek urgent treatment.

Other complications from surgery include bleeding or bruising, damage to the surrounding structures and recurrence of triggering and painful scar.

## Advice following surgery

For the first three days after surgery, keep your hand elevated above the level of your heart to allow the swelling and bruising to subside. You can remove the bulky dressing over your hand after three days. Your surgeon would have used dissolvable stitches to close the wound so there are no stitches to be removed. You must keep the wound dry for 10 days to allow the wound to heal adequately to prevent infection.

Occasionally, the scar from surgery can be painful and massaging it will help ease the pain. Light use of the hand is possible from the day of surgery and active use of the finger is encouraged to prevent complications. For the first two weeks, heavy lifting should also be avoided but can be slowly reintroduced once the scar has completely healed. It is important that you keep your fingers moving by bending them into a fist and straightening them so they lie flat on a table.

### **When can I return to work?**

This depends on the work that you do. For office work, it is when you are comfortable enough. You should avoid anything which makes your finger uncomfortable. For manual work requiring use of all fingers, it may still be possible to return to work with a finger splint – please consult your doctor or physiotherapist beforehand.

### **When can I return to driving?**

You can drive when you are able to control your vehicle without distraction. This is your decision; you can discuss this with your doctor or physiotherapist if you are unsure. You must be safe and in control of the vehicle. The law is very clear that you have to be able to prove to the police that you are 'safe' to drive, so it is entirely your own responsibility and we cannot give you permission to drive.

### **Exercises following surgery**

There are no specific exercises that you need to do. As long as you keep your finger moving this will prevent stiffness and loss of hand function. By six weeks after the operation, your fingers should be moving normally and you should be able to put your hand flat on the table and make a full tight fist. If this is not the case, please contact us directly for further advice.

### **Further information**

- [www.readinghandsurgery.com](http://www.readinghandsurgery.com)
- The British Society for Surgery of the Hand (BSSH) <https://www.bssh.ac.uk/patients/>
- The Royal College of Surgeons of England have some patient information publications available on their website [www.rcseng.ac.uk/patient\\_information](http://www.rcseng.ac.uk/patient_information)

### **Contacting us**

If you require any information or advice from the Hand Therapy Team, you can contact us at the Royal Berkshire Hospital during office hours Monday to Friday via the Clinical Administration Team (CAT 5): 0118 322 7415 or email [rbb-tr.cat5@nhs.net](mailto:rbb-tr.cat5@nhs.net).

To find out more about our Trust visit [www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk](http://www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk)

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RBFT Hand Clinic EC, CM, JV, Orthopaedics, February 2024

Next review due: February 2026

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