**Trigger Finger**

Trigger finger happens when tendons, or their protective sheath, around your fingers or thumb swell up or thicken. The swelling makes it hard for your affected digits to move smoothly. Severe cases can “freeze” your fingers in a flexed position. Treatments are available.

**Overview**

Trigger finger can make your fingers or thumb stick in a flexed position due to swelling or irritation in your tendons.

**What is trigger finger?**

Trigger finger is a condition that makes your fingers or thumb difficult to move. It can “freeze” them in a flexed position. It affects the tendons in your fingers and thumbs. Trigger finger gets its name from the position your fingers can get stuck in — it looks like you’re trying to pull an invisible trigger.

If you have trigger finger, your affected fingers or thumb can be stuck flexed in toward your palm. It can be hard — or impossible — to straighten your affected digits (the medical term for your fingers and thumb). Trigger finger can affect any of your digits, but people most commonly develop it in their ring fingers (your third finger).

**Symptoms and Causes**

**What are trigger finger symptoms?**

The most common symptoms of trigger finger include:

* A snapping or popping feeling when you move your fingers or thumb. It might feel like your affected digits are “catching” or getting stuck as they move.
* Pain and stiffness when flexing your fingers or thumb in toward your palm.
* Soreness in your palm near the base of your fingers or thumb. This pain is usually worse when you’re gripping or grasping something.
* Swelling or a tender lump in the palm of your hand.
* Your fingers or thumb locking (sticking) in a flexed position. You might need to use your other hand to gently push your fingers to straighten out.

Trigger finger symptoms (especially stiffness and locked positions) are usually worse first thing in the morning. Stiffness usually gets a little better as you start using your fingers and thumb.

**What causes trigger finger?**

Swelling in or around the tendons in your fingers or thumb causes trigger finger or trigger thumb.

[Tendons](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/body/21738-tendon) are bands of tissue that attach [muscles](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/body/21887-muscle) to bones. Tendons and muscles in your hands work together to flex and straighten your fingers and thumb. A tunnel of tissue called a sheath surrounds these tendons. The sheath protects them and keeps the tendons in place.

Trigger finger happens when the tendons in your affected fingers or thumb become irritated and swollen ([inflamed](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/symptoms/21660-inflammation)) and can’t easily slide through their sheaths. A bump (nodule) may also form on your affected tendon, which makes it even more difficult for the tendon to easily glide through its sheath.

The nodule often catches or gets stuck on a part of your tendon called the A1 pulley. If it’s harder than usual for your tendon to slide through the A1 pulley, your finger will feel stiff or like it’s getting stuck.

**Trigger finger risk factors**

Anyone can develop trigger finger, but it’s more common in people between the ages of 40 and 60.

Having a job or hobby that requires you to perform strenuous repetitive motions, grasping, gripping or applying a lot of force with your fingers and thumbs can make you more likely to develop trigger finger. Examples include:

* Farming or gardening.
* Industrial work or working with tools.
* Playing an instrument.
* Playing racket sports (like tennis, racquetball or pickleball).

People with certain health conditions are more likely to develop trigger finger, including:

* [Osteoarthritis](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/5599-osteoarthritis).
* [Rheumatoid arthritis](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/4924-rheumatoid-arthritis).
* [Gout](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/4755-gout).
* [Diabetes](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/7104-diabetes).
* [Amyloidosis](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/23398-amyloidosis).
* [Thyroid disease](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/8541-thyroid-disease).

**Diagnosis and Tests**

**How is trigger finger diagnosed?**

A healthcare provider will diagnose trigger finger with a [physical exam](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diagnostics/17366-physical-examination). They’ll examine your hand and fingers and ask about your symptoms. Tell your provider when you first noticed pain and stiffness, and if certain activities make your symptoms worse.

Your provider might straighten your fingers or thumb to feel for clicking and to gauge how stiff your tendons are. Tell them if any motion or position hurts.

**What tests do providers use to diagnose trigger finger?**

Usually, providers don’t need any special tests to diagnose trigger finger. They might use imaging tests like an [ultrasound](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diagnostics/4995-ultrasound) or [X-rays](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diagnostics/21818-x-ray) to take pictures of the tissue and bones in your hand.

**Management and Treatment**

**How is trigger finger treated?**

How a healthcare provider treats trigger finger depends on which of your fingers are affected and the severity of your symptoms. The most common trigger finger treatments include:

* **Rest**: Taking a break from work, hobbies or tasks that caused trigger finger will give your tendons time to heal.
* **Splinting**: You might need to wear a [splint](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/drugs/15211-casts--splints) to hold your affected digits in place and help them stretch back to their usual position.
* **Stretching exercises**:Your provider might give you stretching exercises to help your tendons regain their flexibility.
* **Anti-inflammatory medication**: Over-the-counter [nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/drugs/11086-non-steroidal-anti-inflammatory-medicines-nsaids) — such as naproxen or ibuprofen — relieve pain and reduce swelling. A healthcare provider might also prescribe [corticosteroids](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/drugs/4812-corticosteroids) (prescription anti-inflammatory medications). You might need [cortisone shots](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/17759-cortisone-shots).

**Trigger finger surgery**

You might need surgery if other treatments don’t improve your symptoms. A surgeon will perform a trigger finger release procedure.

They’ll give you a [local anesthetic](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/15286-anesthesia) to numb the area around your affected fingers. They’ll make a tiny cut (incision) in the sheath around your affected tendons. This will give your tendons more space to move through their sheath. Trigger finger releases are outpatient procedures, which means you can go home the same day.

**How soon after treatment will I feel better?**

Your trigger finger symptoms should gradually improve as soon as you start nonsurgical treatments. Your provider will tell you how long you’ll need each treatment and when you can expect your finger to return to its usual flexibility and range of motion (how far you can move it).

You’ll need a few weeks to recover after a trigger finger release surgery before you can start using your fingers or thumb again. It may take a few months to get back to your usual activities after surgery. Your surgeon will tell you what to expect.

**Prevention**

**Can I prevent trigger finger?**

The best way to prevent trigger finger is to avoid overusing your hands, fingers and thumbs. To prevent trigger finger:

* Learn the proper posture or technique for sports or work activities.
* Ease into new exercises or activities to avoid injury.
* Take breaks if you’re doing a repetitive task that puts a lot of stress on your hands.

**Outlook / Prognosis**

**How long does trigger finger usually last?**

How long you experience symptoms depends on which digits have trigger finger and how severe the symptoms are. It can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few months of nonsurgical treatments to get your fingers or thumb back to their usual function. Ask your provider what to expect and how long you’ll need treatment.

**Can trigger finger heal on its own?**

Trigger finger won’t heal on its own. Get your fingers or thumb examined by a healthcare provider if you notice any symptoms of trigger finger. Even if you only need rest or other nonsurgical treatments, a provider needs to examine your digits and diagnose trigger finger or any other health conditions that are causing your symptoms.

**Living With**

**When should I see my healthcare provider?**

Visit a healthcare provider if you notice any symptoms of trigger finger, especially if you can’t move a finger or thumb as far as usual. Go to the emergency room if you suddenly can’t move or use one of your digits.

**What questions should I ask my provider?**

* Do I have trigger finger or another issue?
* What caused the trigger finger?
* Which treatments will I need?
* Will I need surgery?
* How long will I need treatment?

**Additional Common Questions**

**Is trigger finger a form of arthritis?**

Trigger finger and arthritis can both cause pain and stiffness in your fingers and hands, but trigger finger isn’t a type of arthritis.

Trigger finger happens when a tendon or tendon sheath in your fingers or thumb is swollen and can’t move as smoothly as it should.

[Arthritis of the hand](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/7082-arthritis-of-the-wrist-and-hand) affects the tissues in your joints. Eventually, arthritis breaks down tissue in your joints enough to make bones rub against each other. There are 27 joints in your hands and fingers, and arthritis can affect any of them.

**What is the difference between trigger finger and trigger thumb?**

Trigger finger and trigger thumb are the same condition. Healthcare providers use the two names interchangeably depending on which of your digits are affected. Providers sometimes also call trigger finger stenosing [tenosynovitis](https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/23448-tenosynovitis).

These are all the same conditions that a provider will diagnose and treat the same way.

**A note from Cleveland Clinic**

Trigger finger happens when irritation causes a tendon or tendon sheath in your fingers or thumb to swell or thicken. This inflammation can make it hard or impossible to move your affected digit. The good news is that trigger finger is treatable. Even if you need surgery, you should be able to return to all of your usual activities and hobbies after your hand has healed.

Visit a healthcare provider if you notice pain, stiffness or a decreased range of motion in your fingers or thumb. They’ll diagnose the cause and help you find treatments that will relieve your symptoms and restore your finger or thumb’s flexibility.