



## MALLET FINGER INJURY

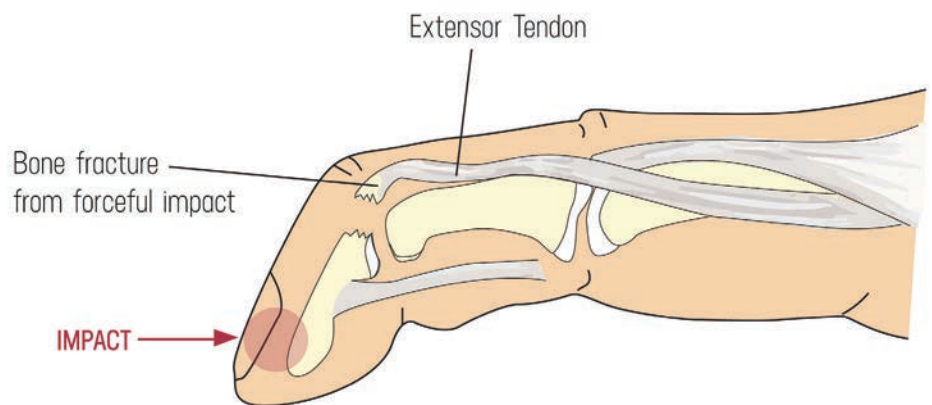
### ABOUT

Mallet finger is when the tip of your finger is bent and you cannot straighten it. This is caused by an injury to the structure that straightens the tip of your finger, the extensor tendon. Injury usually occurs as a result of being hit at the end of the finger (for example by a ball) or as easily as pushing your finger down in between cushions on a couch to clean.

The tendon comes away from or is torn/ruptured near its attachment to the bone and this is the reason why you cannot straighten your finger. It may involve just the tendon, or sometimes part of the bone comes away with the tendon, known as an “avulsion” fracture.

It is important to obtain an x-ray of your finger for several reasons. This helps to determine the most suitable treatment method for your injury. If there is a bony fragment involved this can mean the injury will go on to heal quicker due to the bone having a better blood supply compared to the tendon. However, if the fragment size is deemed to be too large and the joint position is altered surgery may be required.

### MALLET FINGER



### SYMPTOMS

- Immediately after injury the finger may be swollen and bruised
- It is not necessarily painful
- The fingertip will droop and cannot straighten by itself
- Over time, if left untreated, the fingertip may become stiff and this can also cause changes to the middle joint of your finger.

# HOW HAND THERAPY CAN HELP

The finger needs to be held straight at the tip and the tip should NOT be allowed to bend. This allows the tendon/bone to heal. If you do bend the tip of the finger during this time, it may not allow the scar tissue to strengthen and you may find you still cannot straighten it at the end of the treatment. Even if the injury occurred some time ago, treatment may still be effective. In such cases, a longer treatment period may be needed.

Your therapist can make you a custom made thermoplastic orthosis (support), which will maintain the correct position of your finger to allow healing to occur. You must wear the orthosis for 6-8 weeks continuous before movement of the tip can commence.

After this, a further 4-6 weeks of wearing the orthosis at night is required and you are able to gradually increase your functional activities. Your therapist will advise the length of time you will be immobilised and will usually review you weekly to check your skin and ensure the orthosis is fitting correctly. Your therapist will provide you with a graded home exercise program to help regain your finger flexion (bend) and return to your functional activities in a safe timeframe, whilst also maintaining your finger extension (straightening).



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ART AND SCIENCE OF  
REHABILITATION FOR THE UPPER  
LIMB - SHOULDER TO HAND*

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