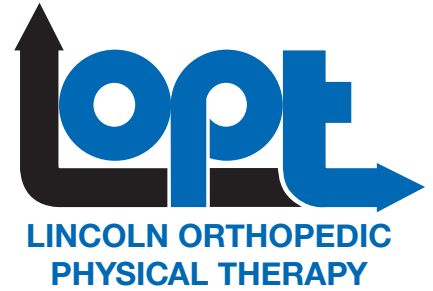


Trigger Finger



Trigger finger is a condition affecting the movement of the tendons as they bend the fingers toward the palm of the hand. This condition can occur in any digit, including the thumb.

The tendons that move the fingers and thumb are held in place on the bones by a series of ligaments called pulleys. These ligaments form a sort of tunnel for the tendons to run through along the bone. Constant irritation as the tendon repeatedly slides through the pulley causes the tendon to swell, thicken and create a nodule or knob. The pulley ligament may thicken as well.

Rheumatoid arthritis, partial tendon lacerations, repeated trauma from pistol-gripped power tools, or long hours grasping a steering wheel can cause triggering. Triggering can also be caused by a congenital defect that forms a nodule in the tendon. The condition is not usually noticeable until infants begin to use their hands.

Symptoms

The symptoms of trigger finger or thumb include a clicking sensation and pain when the digit is bent and straightened. Tenderness usually occurs over the area of the nodule at the bottom of the finger or thumb. The clicking sensation occurs when the nodule moves through the tunnel formed by the pulley ligaments. If the nodule becomes too large it may get stuck and cannot move through the tunnel. Then the finger becomes locked in the flexed trigger position.

Diagnosis

A trigger digit is usually quite obvious on physical examination. A palpable click can be felt as the nodule snaps under the first finger pulley. If the condition has progressed, the nodule may have even swelled to the point where it is caught and the finger is locked. No special tests or X-rays are required.

Treatment

Treatments provided by an LOPT occupational hand therapist may be effective when triggering has been present for less than four months. A hand splint is often used to hold and rest the inflamed area. Special exercises are given to encourage normal gliding of the tendon. Our specialized hand therapists will show you ways to prevent further triggering and to give the inflamed area a chance to heal. Therapy sessions may include iontophoresis, which uses a mild electrical current to push anti-inflammatory medicine to the sore area.

Sometimes, a cortisone injection into the tendon sheath may be needed to decrease the inflammation and shrink the nodule. While this can help relieve triggering pain, the results may be short lived.

When therapy does not result in resolution, the solution for treating a trigger digit is surgery to open the pulley that is obstructing the nodule and keeping the tendon from sliding smoothly. This surgery can usually be done as an outpatient procedure, allowing you to leave the hospital the same day.

We're all about helping people improve their quality of life.

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