

Trigger Finger (Stenosing Tenosynovitis)



What is Trigger Finger?

Trigger finger is a condition that affects the movement of one or more fingers, causing them to catch, click, or lock when bent or straightened. This happens when the flexor tendon has difficulty gliding smoothly through its surrounding sheath due to thickening or irritation of the sheath itself (called the A1 pulley).

It most commonly affects the **ring and middle fingers**, though **the thumb** and other fingers can also be involved. The condition may affect just one digit or multiple fingers and can occur in one or both hands.

Causes and Risk Factors

Trigger finger develops when the **flexor tendon sheath** becomes thickened or irritated, narrowing the space through which the tendon moves. This interferes with normal tendon gliding and may cause it to catch or lock.

Risk factors include:

- Diabetes
 - Rheumatoid arthritis or other inflammatory conditions
 - Female gender
 - Age between 40 and 60
 - Occupations or hobbies that involve frequent hand use
 - Previous hand trauma or surgery
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Symptoms

Symptoms can range from mild to severe and may include:

- A **clicking or catching** sensation during finger movement
- **Stiffness** in the affected finger, often worse in the morning
- **Pain or tenderness** at the base of the finger or thumb
- A **palpable lump** in the palm at the base of the affected finger
- The finger may **lock in a bent position** and then suddenly straighten
- In more advanced cases, the finger may become **stuck** in a bent or straight position and require assistance to move

It is important to note that **not all cases involve full locking**—many patients experience only clicking or catching without the finger becoming stuck.

Diagnosis & Investigation

Trigger finger is typically diagnosed during a consultation based on clinical evaluation. **No imaging is usually required.**

During your visit:

- The **surgeon will take a detailed medical history**, including the duration of symptoms, which fingers are affected, and any underlying health conditions (such as diabetes or arthritis).
- A **physical examination** of the hand will be performed to assess for:
 - Pain or tenderness at the base of the affected finger
 - Catching or triggering on movement
 - Presence of nodules or swelling
 - Any loss of motion or locking

In some complex cases, an **ultrasound** may be used to assess tendon movement, but this is rarely necessary.

Non-Surgical Treatment

The mainstay of non-surgical treatment for trigger finger is a **corticosteroid injection** into the tendon sheath. This reduces inflammation, allowing the tendon to glide more freely.

- **Steroid injection** is quick, typically performed in the clinic, and is effective in many cases—particularly when symptoms are caught early.
- Relief is often felt within days to a few weeks.

Other conservative measures, such as:

- **Splinting**
- **Activity modification**
- **Anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs)**

...may be recommended, but **by the time most patients seek medical attention, these methods have usually already been tried and have not provided sufficient relief.**

Surgical Treatment

If steroid injections are not effective or the finger is severely affected or locked, **surgical release** is recommended.

Trigger Finger Release Surgery

- A short outpatient procedure under **local anaesthetic**
- A small incision is made at the base of the affected finger
- The **A1 pulley (tendon sheath)** is carefully released to allow full, unrestricted tendon movement
- The surgeon will **confirm during the procedure** that the tendon moves freely and is no longer catching

Recovery

- Most patients regain finger motion immediately after surgery
- Light activities can resume within a few days
- Full recovery and return to normal hand function is usually achieved within 2–4 weeks

Risks

Complications are uncommon but may include:

- Infection
- Tenderness or sensitivity at the incision site
- Scar formation

- Incomplete release (rare)
 - Injury to nearby nerves or vessels (rare)
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When to see one of our Hand Specialistse

You may wish to consult a hand specialist if:

- You notice persistent **clicking, catching, or locking**
- Symptoms interfere with everyday activities like gripping or writing
- Your finger feels painful or stiff and is not improving

Book an appointment:

