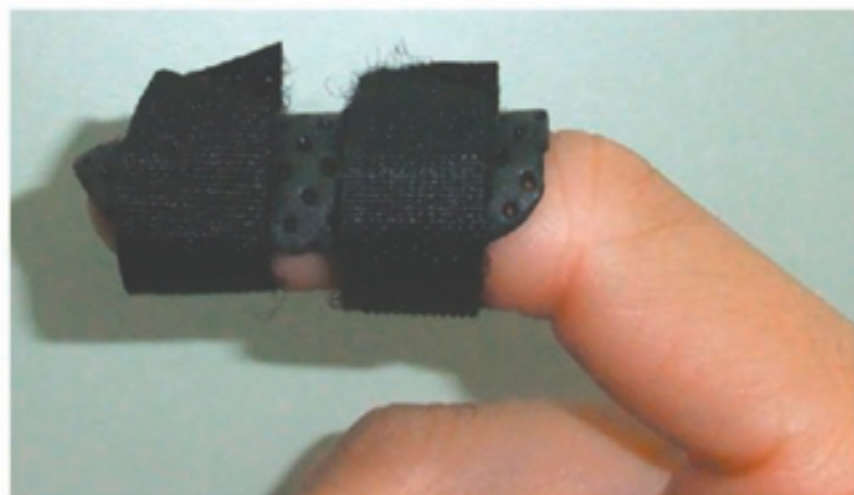


Joint Injuries of the Fingers



Hand therapists treat a large variety of injuries to the hand, wrist, fingers, elbow and shoulder. Frequently we treat injuries involving the fingers including their tendons ligaments, joints and bones.

Our fingers are called upon to undergo significant amounts of stress and tension in the course of everyday life-including work, leisure and sporting activities. We use our hands most of the time consequently the potential for injury is great.

Common finger joint injuries we see at Hand therapy include:

1. Finger fractures/breaks: both simple and complex.
2. Tendon injuries that prevent the tip joint of the finger remaining straight, known as a mallet finger injury.
3. Dislocated fingers: usually involving the ligaments of the joints.
4. Thumb or finger sprains or strains

The thumb's role equates to about 40% of our overall hand function. Some say that the little finger has the next highest functional value in the hand.

The middle joint of the finger, the proximal interphalangeal joint ("PIP" joint), makes up for 85% of the bend in the finger in each finger.

The loss of movement in one finger, or one finger joint, will often affect the motion of the adjacent digits and consequently the whole hand. Motion and function can be affected.

Use of the tip joint of the finger, the distal interphalangeal joint ("DIP" joint), contributes approximately 20% of overall grip strength.

Each finger joint is important to using our hands and can greatly impact every day activities if injured.

It is important to seek further professional opinion if you have an injury to your thumb, fingers or hand to maximise recovery potential following injury or disease processes, such as arthritis.

Fractures

Fractures involving the middle joint of the finger can be of the bone above or below the PIP joint. If the fracture involves the joint surface the recovery can be more complex and there is a greater risk of developing arthritis in that joint.

It is really important to seek early professional advice from your treating Doctor or Hand Therapist. Your General Practitioner can assess and provide appropriate referral to Hand Surgeon or Orthopaedic Specialist.

The sooner a finger fracture, especially a more complicated one, is treated correctly, the better the chance for a full recovery. Even simple finger fractures need to be given correct treatment to get the best results, as they can affect the function of the affected finger as well as the whole hand.

Mallet Finger

These injuries most frequently occur from a ball hitting the finger or an axial load through the finger tip eg hitting tip into a hard object.

It is a relatively common injury that is often not treated correctly. Causes

The injury results because the distal insertion of the extensor tendon is avulsed or torn from the bone at the end of the finger, sometimes this involves a small fragment of bone. In both cases the result is a drooping of the end of the finger. You may be able to lift the end of the finger up with your other hand but the position is not maintained actively, or without holding it up.

Early, correct and continuous, immobilisation is vital to increase the chance of healing and of full normal use of finger in the future. It is important that this injury is immobilised correctly or secondary deformity can occur.

Private patients can attend our clinic without a doctor's referral. Third party claims or workers compensation require a doctor's referral.

Recent research shows that mallet fingers are almost always treated best with conservative hand therapy treatment, involving splinting and appropriate education.

Surgery is reserved for cases where there is significant displacement of the joint or where splintage has failed.

Dislocated Fingers

These are also a common finger joint injury, usually occurring in sports

involving balls, bats or contact sports. Often the joint hyper-extends, or is bent back too far.

Dislocated fingers can be quite complex and can take months to fully heal. Hand Therapy can provide treatment and advice to protect the joint, prevent re-dislocation, decrease swelling and increase the amount of movement and strength regained, at a time that is safe to do so.

Splinting may be required to prevent deformity in the initial healing phase.

Don't be complacent with finger injuries. Your hands are too important. Early treatment ensures good management of the injury and encourages a better outcome.

If you're unsure, call us to see if we can help.

Key Points

- **Finger injuries left untreated or that are not treated in a timely manner or incorrectly can not only lead to deformity of the finger, but also can affect the function of the whole hand.**
- **So don't put off doing something about an injury to your finger or hand. Ask your Doctor for a referral to Hand Therapy or you can make an appointment without a Doctor's referral if it's not a compensable injury.**
- **Limited hand function can have a big impact on a person's ability to perform their work duties or to participate in sport or leisure activities or even just to do the things of everyday life.**
- **Mismanagement of hand injury can lead to early arthritis or deformity of the joints.**
- **Hand Therapists are well educated in the treatment of hand injuries and have extensive knowledge on the best approach to address your injury or condition.**

