

# Trigger Thumb

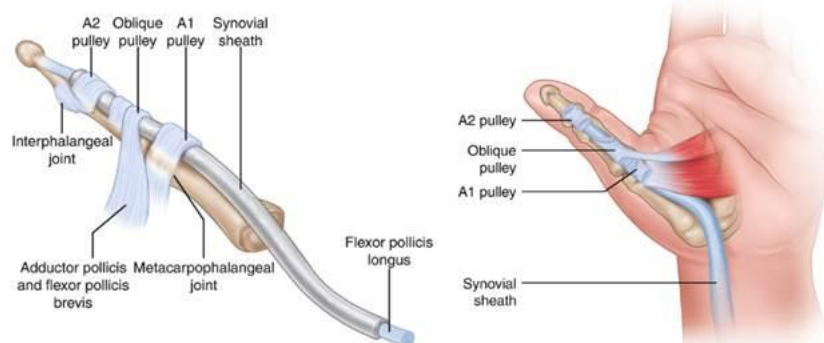
## Information for patients

### Aim of this leaflet

Providing information and advice on the management of Trigger Thumb.

### What does it mean?

Trigger Thumb is a common disorder of the hand which causes a painful snapping, or locking, of the thumb.



The medical term for this is Stenosing Tenosynovitis.

- Stenosing refers to the narrowing of an opening, or passageway in the body.
- Tenosynovitis refers to inflammation of the outer covering of the tendons that bend and straighten the thumb.

### Why does Trigger Thumb occur?

The tendons work like ropes, connecting the forearm with the bones of the fingers and thumb. In the thumb, pulleys form a tunnel under which the tendons must glide. These pulleys hold the tendons close to the bone.

Trigger Thumb occurs when the tendon develops a nodule or swelling of the lining. This results in the tendon having to squeeze through the opening of the tunnel (flexor sheath) causing pain or popping. When the tendon catches, it will become more inflamed and swollen, creating a vicious cycle. Sometimes the thumb may become stuck and it is hard to straighten or bend.

## Treatment of Trigger Thumb

The aims of the treatment are as follows:

- to reduce pain
- to reduce inflammation/swelling
- to return to full use of the hand
- prevent recurrence of the condition

### Splinting

- Your therapist will provide you with a splint which prevents the top joint from bending but allows bending at the knuckle.
- The splint prevents the thumb movement which causes pain and aims to reduce the swelling and inflammation of the tendon, by resting the joint.
- You are advised to wear the splint at all times for 6-8 weeks initially, followed by a review with your therapist. Following review, the splinting may be continued, depending upon the symptoms.

### Exercises and massage

- Normal use of the hand with the splint on is encouraged.
- The following exercises need to be carried out **5 times** a day, **5 repetitions** of each:
  - 1) knuckle bending with the splint **on**.
  - 2) thumb bending and straightening **passively, using the other hand with splint off**.

Your therapist may also advise you to carry out some massage around the affected area. This may help with decreasing the swelling, and hence the symptoms.

**Author: Hand Injury Unit © October 2024**

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