

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

To be completed by the Communications office
Leaflet code: PIL202310-01-MAF
Created: October 2023/ Review Date: October 2025

Information reproduced with permission from
Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Trust

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Discharge advice

Mallet finger



Healthier Communities,
Outstanding Care

What is a mallet finger?

You have torn the tendon which straightens the end joint of your finger. The tendon may also have pulled off a small fragment of bone. Your fingertip is drooping because the tendon used to straighten it has snapped. This is called 'mallet finger'. It is often caused by catching the finger 'end-on' during sport, but it sometimes results from a minor injury such as catching the finger when tucking in bed sheets. The tendon may tear where it joins on to the end or may pull off a small piece of bone at this point (if this happens, this is called a 'mallet fracture').

To treat this injury the finger must be held straight in a splint to allow the tendon to heal. The splint is worn continuously for six to eight weeks (or sometimes a shorter period for mallet fractures, which can heal more quickly than tendon tears). It is very important that the end joint does not bend during the splinting treatment period. The splint will allow the tip of the finger to be kept extended when the hand is in use. At the end of this time the splint is worn for one to two weeks at night and whenever the finger might be at risk of injury.

Swelling and bruising at the fracture site is normal. Simple, over the counter pain killers will help to reduce swelling and pain.

Cleaning

The splint needs to be taken off twice daily to clean your finger and the splint. If not, the splint will start to smell. When you remove the splint to wash the finger, you must hold it straight on a flat surface and not allow it to bend. You will be shown how to change the splint safely. Healing may be delayed or may not occur at all if the finger is allowed to bend.

Most injuries treated by splinting will heal satisfactorily leaving normal function in the affected finger. There may be slight loss of full straightening at the completion of treatment, and it may take several months to regain satisfactory function.

Redness, swelling and tenderness of the skin on top of the end joint are common for three or four months after injury, but usually settle down eventually.

Mallet fractures may leave a small bump on the top of the end joint and slight loss of bending of the joint, but pain is rare and the finger generally functions well. Occasionally the tendon fails to repair itself. It can be treated by a further period of splinting. Surgical repair can be attempted, but the results are not consistently good.

You should:

- Keep your hand elevated, exercising all the joints except for the end joint of the splinted finger.
- Check your skin regularly to monitor for any sores developing under the splint.

You should not:

- Wear any rings on this hand until the injured finger has healed. All rings should be removed at the time of injury to avoid swelling and circulatory problems.
- Miss any appointments with the specialist if these have been requested.

Problems and further advice

A fracture liaison service is available, and advice can be given over the telephone.

If there are any issues or you have any concerns/ questions, we advise you seek help.

Call the fracture liaison nurses on 01623 622515, extension 4114 or 6807, between 8am and 4pm, Monday to Friday.

Outside of these hours, or for urgent advice, please go to your nearest Emergency Department.