

Orthopaedic Connection

Mallet Finger

By Thomas J. Haverbush, M.D.
Orthopaedic Surgeon

Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

What in the world is Mallet Finger? It is not a finger that has been struck by a mallet. If that happens to you, you will probably say a few choice words!

Well, I have an idea it is not what you think.

Jeopardy

An injured finger that droops at the outer joint and can't be straightened.

What is _____ a mallet finger?

How You Get It

Something strikes the end of the finger and forces it sharply downward. Then ouch - the extensor tendon on top of the finger ruptures. Dang, you look at the end of your finger and try as you will, it won't straighten.

Don't wait a few weeks as most people do thinking it will get better.

It won't. Trust me.

I don't like to see these injuries late as valuable healing time has been lost.

What Is It?

The extensor tendon on top of your finger ruptures and pulls away from the bone, sometimes pulling a piece of bone with it. It is then impossible to straighten the finger tip.

Diagnosis

It is diagnosed primarily by examination of the finger. I always take an x-ray so I don't miss a fracture that may be present.

If Not Treated

Without treatment your finger is headed for trouble. Your finger tip over time will be permanently flexed or bent.

Every time you reach in your pocket the tip of your finger gets in the way and you may swear!

Treatment

If the tendon is ruptured and there is no fracture, I treat it with a special splint that holds the tip of the finger straight. Typically it takes at least six to eight weeks to get initial healing of the tendon.

If there is a broken piece of bone present, sometimes surgery is needed to repair the injury with metal pins.

What Else?

All too often I see these hand injuries late (weeks) and when I take an x-ray I find a fracture along with the drooping finger.

That makes treatment really difficult. It can result in permanent deformity of the finger even if treated.

Key point: Early diagnosis and treatment of the finger usually results in a successful outcome.

Gratiot County Herald Archive and Office Website

A great source of all of the musculoskeletal information that you need can be found at www.orthopodsurgeon.com. It contains a tremendous amount of musculoskeletal information that can be very helpful to you, your family and friends.

In addition, it is your entry to the Gratiot County Herald archive of all articles I have written for Gratiot County Herald Orthopaedic Connection. All of the articles are listed, most recent all the way back to the first. A couple of mouse clicks and the whole article appears.

The articles and website cover every thing I treat in the office and hospital. Please log on and check it out.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush