

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Baseball Finger

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

I can't think of a better time to discuss an injury to those who play baseball. Not that it doesn't occur elsewhere, but it is especially common in baseball players. *Mallet finger* is another name for it. Same thing really.

O.K., What is it?

A force hitting the end of the finger causes it. In this case a baseball, but it could be anything. The force bends the finger beyond its limit and the tendon on top tears or ruptures. Ouch! Sometimes pieces of bone break where the tendon attaches.

Symptoms

Pain on the top of the finger at the base of the fingernail. Swelling. Redness. Tenderness. Most importantly - the tip of the finger can't be straightened and hangs down abnormally. Don't ignore this! It's important. It won't get better over time. (Hopefully it is why you read this stuff every week.)

Get it checked, soon.

It is not a trivial injury. It won't cure itself. I will examine the whole hand. It definitely will require an x-ray because of a possible fracture or dislocation. If there is any bleeding at the base of the nail, it is even more important because infection can develop in the finger, even in the bone.

How I treat the finger

Accurate diagnosis as always leads to the best treatment.

- If the x-ray is O.K. and I am dealing with tendon alone a special type of splint may be tried. Any old splint is no good. There is a special one for this injury.
- The tendon ends have to be held together properly for this to work.
- I check it often. Splinting may take several weeks.
- If, as I keep checking it, it doesn't seem to be holding, the finger needs surgery.

Surgery

You are saying to yourself, "Gee, I thought it was just a jammed finger."

- If splinting is not working I need to repair the tendon and insert a pin. Pin is taken out in several weeks.
- If there is a fracture of a certain size it needs to be repaired usually by pinning.
- After surgery the finger will need to be splinted to protect it for up to 6 - 8 weeks.
- Pins are always removed when enough healing has occurred.

Bad Finger

Not treated properly it results in a deformed, drooping finger. You can't straighten it. It's always in the way. It's hard to get something out of a pocket because the finger is bent and gets caught.

Then to fix it I have to fuse the finger joint to hold it straight and make the hand more functional. In most cases that is avoided if treated properly at first.

I hope this article will help you and those you know get proper treatment for this injury early - and avoid the complications that can happen.

Once again, thanks for being an Argus Orthopaedic Zone reader. For much more good information about all the Orthopaedic things I treat in the office and hospital check out www.orthopodsurgeon.com, which can take you to Your Orthopaedic Connection.

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