

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Fingertip Injuries, Infections

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

You are working in the kitchen slicing something with a knife or maybe in your shop with a power saw. One minute you are fine, the next your hand is bloody and you cut off the end of a finger or fingers.

It is one of the most common injuries I treat.

The cut may involve only the pad of the finger or may extend through the nail and even into the bone.

The Injury

The cut is usually (not always) in the non-dominant hand, the one you are positioning the object with. Finger tips can be cut off completely or still be partially attached.

There usually is considerable bleeding. Wrap your finger(s) in clean cloth bandages to stop the bleeding while you seek emergency treatment.

How I Treat It

Certainly some wounds can be managed in the emergency room. If bone is exposed or there is tendon involvement etc., I feel strongly that these need to be treated in surgery for the best result possible. Often these injuries are treated way too casually.

The hand needs to be thoroughly cleaned, repaired and closed, the tendon and nerve repaired etc. To do this properly can only be done in surgery. After I do this I send patients home the same day on antibiotics and see them in the office in a few days.

Crush Injuries

Sometimes finger tips can be crushed rather than amputated or lacerated. Crushing injuries damage the skin and soft tissue, break the bone of the tip, damage the nail and nail bed – in short really mangle the end of the finger even to the first joint.

X-rays are always needed as part of a good evaluation. The injury is, I am afraid, often treated too casually in the Emergency Room and can end up as a bad result.

I have taken most of these to surgery to give the person the best chance for a good result.

Infections

Infections are usually located in the pad of the finger where your fingerprint is or around the edge of the nail.

Pad infections come from puncture wounds or cuts. They are serious and can destroy the nearby bone. Edge of the nail infections can occur after a manicure, from a hangnail or ingrown nail.

Pain, at times is severe; swelling and redness indicate trouble. These infections are nasty and can involve tendons and the nearby joint in addition to the previously mentioned bone infection.

Treatment of Infection

In the earliest stages a fingertip can be treated with antibiotics. But both types of infection, at times, must be drained to remove pus. Occasionally the nail has to be removed (but it grows back in months).

I have been talking about a very small part of the anatomy, but neglected infection and injuries can cause the loss of the end of your finger. I have had to amputate the end of fingers many times and in most cases it is preventable with prompt, proper care. Will it be you next? It doesn't have to be.

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