



OA and Trigger Finger: What Is It?

by LANA BARHUM

What is Arthritis Trigger Finger?

The medical term for trigger finger is “stenosing tenosynovitis.” It refers to a condition where any of your fingers or thumbs snaps or locks regardless of whether your hand is open or closed.

Causes and Risk Factors

Tendons act as cords attaching our muscles to our bones. Every single one of your tendons are covered with a protective sheath (a covering that surrounds living tissue.)

A trigger finger will occur when the finger's tendon covering is irritated and inflamed. When this happens, the natural sliding motion of the tendon through the sheath is compromised.

Persistent irritation and inflammation of the tendon sheath eventually cause scarring, thickening, and formation of nodules (bumps under your skin). The eventual result is that the tendon's movement is hampered.

What Puts Me At Risk for Trigger Finger?

Several different things put you at a higher risk of developing this condition.

Repeated Gripping

If you have job or hobby that involves repetitive hand use and gripping, you have an increased risk of developing it.

Arthritic Conditions

People who have arthritic diseases, i.e. rheumatoid arthritis, have a higher risk of developing trigger finger. It is also common in individuals who have osteoarthritis (OA).

Your Sex and Age

Women and people over 60 appear to be at a higher risk of developing this condition.

History of Surgery On Your Hand, Wrist or Fingers

Research shows that individuals who have had prior surgery on a hand, wrist or finger also have an increased risk for development of trigger finger.

One 2015 review from researchers out of the State University of New York, Buffalo, New York, looked at 792

carpal tunnel release (CTR) surgeries and found 6.3% of the patients had developed new onset trigger finger after CTR.

Symptoms

The signs of trigger finger progress from mild to painfully severe. They include:

- Stiffness in the affected finger, especially in the morning
- Popping or clicking sounds and feelings when the finger is moved
- Tenderness or a nodule in the affected finger
- Finger locking in a bent position which is difficult to straighten
- A finger in a bent position that pops back suddenly on its own

Trigger finger affects the middle or ring fingers but it is possible for more than one finger to be affected or both hands to be involved.

The triggering seems to be worse in the morning for most people or when trying to grasp objects or straighten fingers.

Diagnosis

You should see a doctor as soon as you notice stiffness or locking in any of your finger joints.

Signs of warmth, tenderness or inflammation may indicate a possible infection and require immediate medical attention.

Your doctor will diagnose trigger finger with a physical exam of your hands and fingers. He or she will look for swelling and bumps over the joint and in the palm of your hand.

Your doctor will also look to see if your finger is locked or bent or if it is stiff and painful. A diagnosis can easily be made without x-rays or lab work.

Treatment

Treatment of trigger finger depends on how severe your symptoms are and how long you have been dealing with them.

Home Remedies

Your doctor will recommend avoiding activities that cause symptoms. However, it is suggested to use home remedies such as treating trigger finger with cold packs, rest, and over-the-counter pain medications.

Massaging the area can also help, but care must be taken to avoid re-injuring the area.

Finger Splint

Your doctor may put a splint on your hand to keep you from moving the joint. If your symptoms continue, you may be prescribed stronger medications to help with inflammation.

Steroid Injections

Steroid injections are the next option if the symptoms don't get better. Cortisone is injected into the tendon sheath around the affected tendon.

Most patients respond well to cortisone injections, but for some, the response is only temporary.

After two injections and the return of symptoms, your doctor may recommend surgery to release the tendon sheath or to remove inflamed and scarred tissues.

Surgery

Surgery is a permanent cure to trigger finger. A hand surgeon can perform a trigger finger release procedure which is minimally invasive and has a short recovery time.

Prevention

As with most hand, wrist and finger conditions, the best way to avoid trigger finger is to avoid overuse of your fingers. If you notice stiffness and swelling, give your fingers plenty of rest.

It is recommended to alternate activities to keep your fingers from getting inflamed.

However, if you do experience inflammation in your fingers, take an over the counter anti-inflammatory medicine, such as ibuprofen, to reduce swelling before inflammation gets worse.

Arthritis Trigger Finger: The Bottom Line...

It is important to remember that this is a highly treatable condition, and you may get a lot of benefit from splitting and home remedies. Most people recover completely after receiving cortisone injections.

In conclusion, even if you need surgery, your trigger finger will be cured after the procedure.