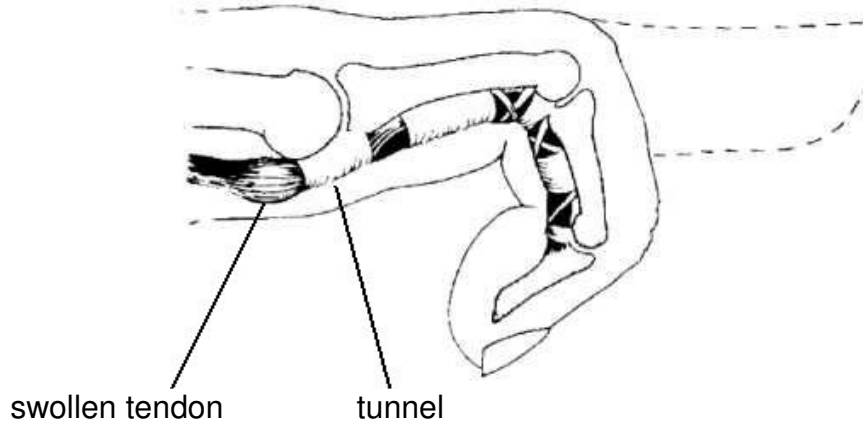


Trigger Finger

Trigger finger is a common problem that causes a digit to “click” or “catch” when trying to make a fist. Sometimes the digit will get stuck in a flexed position, and the other hand will have to pull the digit away from the palm (ouch!). It is commonly associated with pain and tenderness in the palm near the base of the digit, or out in the finger itself.

Trigger finger is a form of tendinitis affecting the tendons that flex the finger down to the palm. The tendons pass through a “tunnel” (see figure), and inflammation forms at the base of the tunnel. The tunnel and the tendon both swell, causing a “lump” in the tendon that won’t pass through the tunnel without a click. Sometimes the lump in the tendon becomes so large it will no longer pass through the tunnel, causing the finger to lock.



Although trigger finger can occasionally resolve without treatment, usually it must be treated either with a cortisone shot or a small operation. The cortisone shot is done in the palm near the base of the digit, and is successful about 70% of the time. People with diabetes may not be cured by a cortisone shot as frequently as non-diabetics.

Surgery for trigger finger (called “trigger finger release”) is usually done under local anesthesia. A small (less than one-half inch) incision is made in the palm near the base of the digit. The tight spot at the beginning of the tunnel is then divided, making room for the tendon to pass through without restriction. A dressing is put on the hand for a couple days, and gentle exercises are performed. The stitches are removed after ten days.

There are some possible risks with trigger finger release. As with any operation, an infection may rarely develop. There are small nerves near the tendon tunnel, and possibly they could be injured, leading to numbness in the finger. That is a very rare complication. Also, it is possible that the tight spot in the tunnel may not be completely released, resulting in continued triggering of the finger. However, when we do the operation under local anesthesia we can have you move your finger during the operation to ensure that the restricting area has been adequately released. Finally, sometimes the finger may not regain completely normal range of motion, especially if the range of motion is less than normal before the operation is done.