

## CONDITIONS

### TRIGGER FINGER

Trigger finger (stenosing tenosynovitis) is a common condition caused by the tendons of the hand catching the neck of the pulley at the base of the finger or thumb. The pulleys are specialised bands within the wall of the lubricated sheath or tunnel that holds the flexor tendons close to the bones of the hand. The pulleys are essential to maintain the mechanical efficiency of finger flexion, (a ruptured pulley allows the tendon to bow-string away from the finger joint and leads to stiffness).

A thickening of the first (A1) pulley leads to tightness and catching of the flexor tendon. The covering of the tendon may become inflamed leading to the development of a lump or nodule. Often a specific cause is not identifiable.

### SYMPTOMS

Patients complain of sticking or locking of the finger in flexion, pain at the base of the finger, and tenderness over any lump or nodule. Symptoms may be worse on waking or after extensive use of the hand.

### MAKING THE DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis can usually be confirmed reliably during a normal consultation. Patients are asked to give a history of the symptoms and are examined looking for stiffness, catching of the tendon, the presence of a nodule, and tenderness over the flexor tendon as it passes into the flexor sheath.

### TREATMENT

Non-surgical treatments: activity modification, Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory medication may help. A steroid injection (triamcinalone) into the flexor sheath will be effective in 50% of cases. In children the disorder may resolve spontaneously (assessment by a hand specialist is required to exclude other pathology.)

Surgical treatment: if non-surgical treatment fails, surgery can help. The operation can be performed through a short incision in the palm (less than 2cm) under local anaesthetic as a day case procedure. Patients have a light dressing for 2 days, and can return to driving when the hand is comfortable and strong. The recovery period varies from person to person (the figures I have quoted are merely a guide).

| Type of work   | return to work after surgery |
|--|------------------------------|
| Managerial   | 1 day                        |
| Clerical/secretarial                                 | 2 weeks                      |
| Manual (cleaning, kitchen, health-care worker)       | 3 weeks                      |
| Heavy manual (HGV driver, builder, infantry soldier) | 3 weeks                      |
| Rescue services (fire / ambulance service)           | 3 weeks                      |