

“Trigger-Finger” Uncocked

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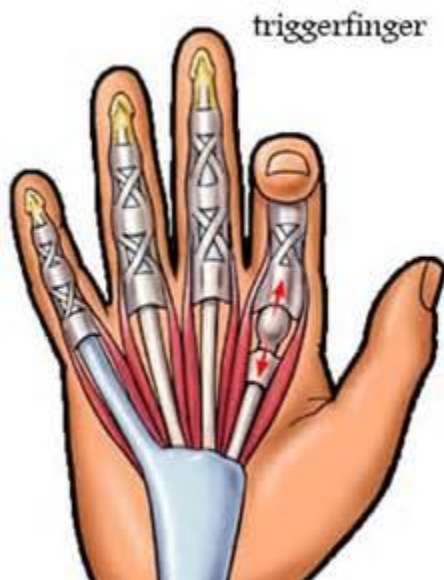
By Dr. Derek Conte

Also called, *stenosing tenosynovitis*, “trigger-finger” is an aggravating and sometimes very painful condition in which the *tendons* of the hand develop nodular enlargements disallowing them to pass smoothly through the tubular *synovial sheath* in the palm in which they normally easily glide (See the illustration below). As a result there is a catching or bumping feeling in the hand when it is actively opened or closed, and the finger pops, like a trigger being released. Thus the term: “trigger-finger”. Sometimes the finger can get stuck and may need help. Usually trigger-finger affects one finger, most often the ring finger. This condition can inhibit or prevent activities that require dexterity.

Trigger-finger can be caused by local trauma or overuse to either the hand or to the flexor muscles of the forearm that make the hand form a fist. The functional anatomy is akin to a bicycle brake system: The brake handle is squeezed and it pulls on a cable which moves freely inside a tubing and applies force to the brake pads which in turn squeeze the tire rim. If one were to put a big knot in this cable, it wouldn’t glide very well inside the tube!

Medical treatment usually includes splinting the affected finger to an adjacent one to help it move more smoothly. If that doesn’t work, anti-inflammatory injections might be used at the location of the nodule to reduce its size. Finally, minor surgery can be done to “release” the synovial sheath (like making one cut along the length of a straw) to allow the nodule to move without restraint.

Alternative, and non-invasive, treatments would be to stretch the tight muscles in the forearm to reduce the strain and swelling (See the illustration below). Additionally, I have noticed in my practice that performing “trigger-points” directly to the painful and swollen nodules in the palm are very effective in reducing the size and pain of the nodules and restoring a smoother movement of the finger. These latter techniques really address the crux of the problem and, in my opinion, should be tried first. Your chiropractor or a good massage therapist should be able to help you with these. Time to get your trigger-finger uncocked!



Note enlargement of tendon.



Stretching hand and forearm helps.

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