

Mallet finger in children and young people

Information for patients, parents and carers

Mallet finger is an injury to the end of a finger. It happens when an object, like a ball, hits the tip of a finger and bends the joint down too fast and too far. The force of the hit can either tear the extensor tendon (picture 1) or break the bone (picture 2).



Picture 1



Picture 2

The extensor tendon connects muscle to a bone so a finger can straighten out (extend). When a mallet injury occurs the fingertip stays bent. You can straighten out your finger with your other hand, but it will go back to its bent position.

Treatment

A splint will be applied to keep the finger in a straight position at the end joint. The splint is worn continuously for 6 weeks followed by a further 2 weeks at night and for activities.

It is **very important** that the end joint does not bend during the splinted period.

When you remove the splint to wash your child's finger, it must be held straight on a flat surface and not allowed to bend. You will be shown how to this.



The vast majority of injuries treated by a splint will heal satisfactorily, leaving normal function. Very occasionally, the tendon fails to heal; it can be treated by further splinting and possible surgical repair, although most fingers function well despite a droop at the end joint.

Mallet fractures may leave a small bump on the top of your finger and very rarely result in some loss of movement in the joint. Redness, tenderness and swelling are common for 3 to 4 months but will settle.

If you have any concerns about your child's finger, please call 0131 312 0007/8 and ask for an appointment to be seen in the review clinic.