

Education

Finger Fractures

What is a finger fracture?

A fracture is a break in a bone. When you break your finger the break may be small or large, may be straight or crooked, and may go into the joint (the place where 2 finger bones meet).

How does it occur?

A finger fracture usually occurs from hitting a hard object with your finger, being hit by a ball, getting slammed in a door, or falling onto your hand.

What are the symptoms?

You will have pain, swelling and tenderness on the finger that is injured. You may have difficulty moving that finger and it may look crooked.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will review your symptoms, ask about how the injury occurred, and examine you. An x-ray of your finger will be taken. The x-ray will show if there is a break.

How is it treated?

If the broken bone is crooked your provider will straighten it. Then a splint will be placed on your finger. Depending on the type of fracture the splint may be placed on the bottom surface of your finger or the top surface. Your provider will decide if your finger should be kept straight or slightly bent. You will need to wear this splint for 3 to 6 weeks, depending on your injury. Some finger fractures don't need to be splinted, they only need to be taped to the finger next to it (called "buddy taping").

Fractures that are large, crooked, or go into the joint may need surgery.

Treatment will also include:

- Elevating your finger by placing your hand on a pillow when you sleep or the back of a couch when you are sitting down.
- Putting an ice bag on your injured finger for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours for the first 2 to 3 days.
- Taking anti-inflammatory medicine or other medicine prescribed by your provider.

You will need to start doing finger exercises when your fracture has healed. You may need a follow-up x-ray to see if your finger has healed.

What are the complications?

Even small fractures may cause swelling in the joints where the injury is. Sometimes this swelling may take weeks or months to go away, and in some cases may be permanent. Some fingers are crooked when the fracture heals.

How long will the effects last?

It usually takes 4 to 6 weeks for a broken finger to heal. Most simple finger fractures heal without any problems. If the fracture goes into a joint your finger may continue to feel stiff and can lose some range of motion. You may develop arthritis in your finger over time.

When can I return to my normal activities?

Everyone recovers from an injury at a different rate. Return to your activities will be determined by how soon your finger recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury has occurred. The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your normal activities as soon as is safely possible. If you return too soon you may worsen your injury.

You may return to your normal activities when your finger has full range of motion without pain and has the same strength as the uninjured side. You may be able to participate in some activities while wearing a splint or while your finger is buddy-taped.

How can I prevent a finger fracture?

Most finger fractures happen from accidents that are not preventable.

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