

## Mallet Finger

*“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”*

*Marybeth Ezaki, MD, Past President, American Society for Surgery of the Hand*

### What is a mallet finger?

A mallet finger is an injury where the fingertip droops down into a bent position. The injury is caused by damage to the tendon or bone located just below the fingertip. The droop occurs at a joint known as the distal interphalangeal (DIP) joint.



*Example of a mallet finger*

### What causes a mallet finger?

A frequent cause of a mallet finger is when a ball hits the tip of the finger, causing a blow to the back of the DIP joint. The injury can also happen during daily activities such as making a bed when the finger gets “jammed.” Sometimes the injury is caused by a deep cut across the back of the joint.



*Everyday activities such as making the bed can cause a mallet finger*

### What are the symptoms of a mallet finger?

A person with a mallet finger will not be able to straighten the fingertip. The tip joint may be painful, red or swollen. Over time, other joints of the finger can develop stiffness if not treated.

### What is the treatment for a mallet finger?

The injury will not heal if the tip joint bends. It must be kept very straight for six to eight weeks. If the joint bends before the healing is complete, the finger will need to be held straight longer. Once the mallet finger has healed, motion of the joint is gradually added to make sure the tip of the finger does not begin to droop again. If the mallet finger does not heal, surgery can stabilize the joint.

### What can a hand therapist do for me?

A hand therapist can make a cast or custom orthosis to hold the tip of the finger in the correct position to heal properly. Instructions can be provided on how to keep the fingertip perfectly straight while washing and doing other activities. When it is time for the tip joint to move, the hand therapist will help slowly reduce time wearing the orthosis and increase motion to prevent the tip from drooping again. The hand therapist will make sure all the joints of the injured finger are moving well.



*Example of a mallet finger orthosis*