

## Move That Finger?

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We've all "jammed" our finger before. Whether from falling or catching a football, finger injuries are debilitating. Most times we keep playing not realizing until weeks down the road that my finger is stiff or still hurts. Finger "jams" may be more than they appear.

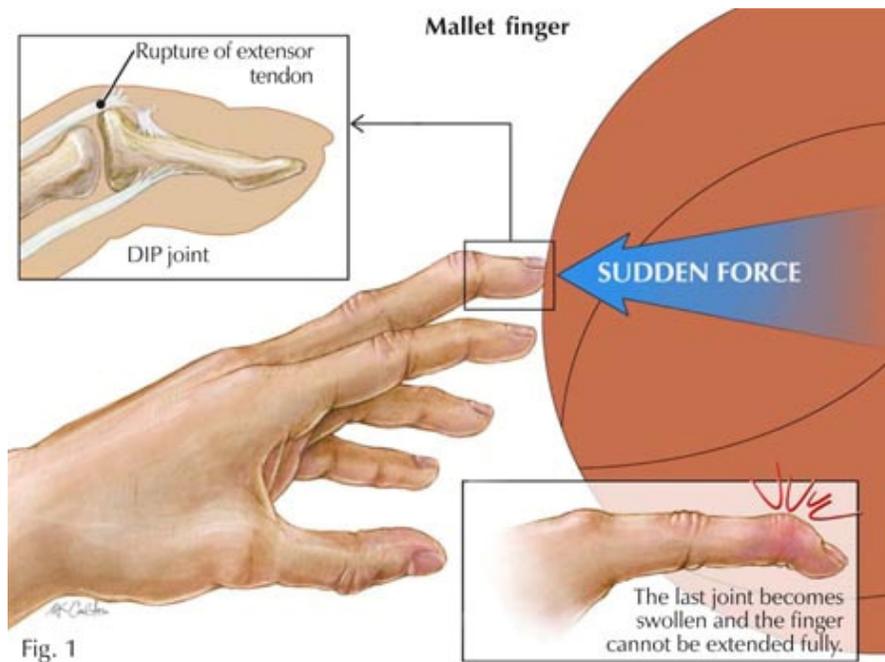
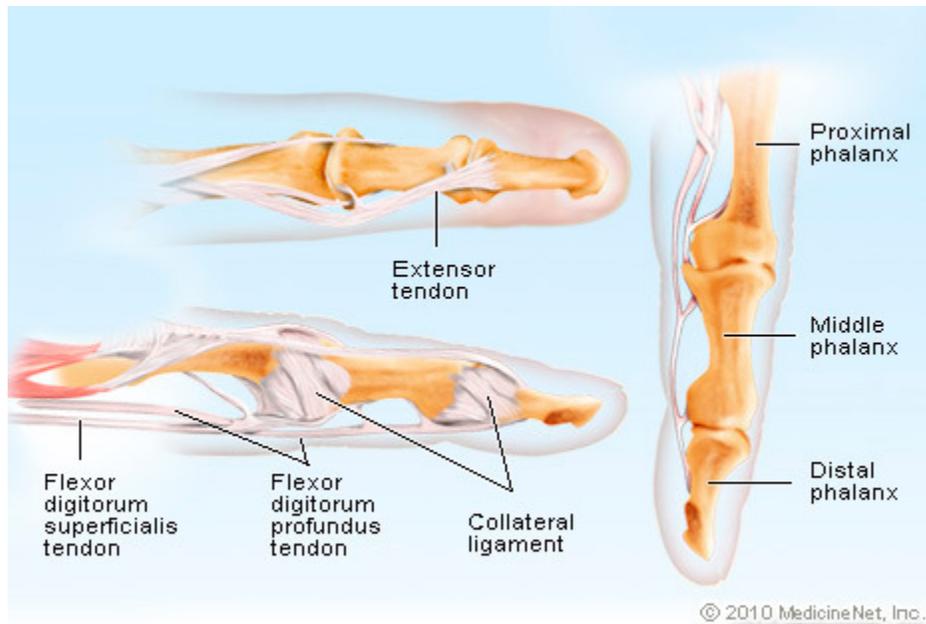


Fig. 1

Fingers function from a complex interaction of bones, tendons, ligaments and skin. This interaction allows finger movement and hand use to maximum ability. Injury to the fingers can represent insult to any one or all the structures. The hand commonly swells after an injury and can be painful. Gut reaction is to protect the finger and not move it. This may be the right answer in certain situations, but not always.



With simple sprains, the ligaments are stretched. Imagine pulling a rubber band to the point where it does not break but can no longer tightly hold together the items it once did. This is similar to how ligaments work in our body. Severe ligament injuries cannot hold the bones stable. This can cause the finger to be unstable or even make the joint dislocate or go out of place.

While ligaments stabilize joints, muscle attaches to bone via tendons and allows these joints to move. Disruption of the tendon will make it virtually impossible to move the finger or hand completely. Fractures or broken bones cause loss of a major structural component of the body. Imagine a large crack in a load bearing beam of your house. If this crack makes the structure unstable, it affects not only the beam but also other components connected to it. The bone behaves in a similar fashion, making its integrity extremely important in treating injuries.

Your finger may look black and blue after a fall, but the important question is whether the injury is stable. Icing and elevation to control swelling and pain are important and a good

idea. Splinting can provide comfort as well, but unnecessary immobilization can lead to joint stiffness, a very difficult problem to recover from completely.

A certified healthcare provider will want to know about the injury and will check to see what structures they feel may be injured. Evaluation can initially include x-rays to look for fractures, dislocations and/or changes to the joints. Common questions you should be prepared to answer are:

1. How and when the injury took place?
2. What has been done about the injury (example: did you or someone pull on the finger to make it look straight)?
3. Are there other symptoms like numbness or loss of feeling?
4. What activities are you interested in doing with the hand?

The goal of treatment is to always allow safe and fast use of the hand. In order to do this, you may need a variety of treatment(s) that can include early movement, immobilization, rehabilitation and/or surgery.

Hand injuries represent an astonishing 10% of emergency room visits, proving that the hand is important to us and commonly injured. Whether it is shooting a basketball or typing at work, full use of the hand does make life easier. So, don't end up with a stiff finger if you don't have to. Be proactive. You may be back in the game safer and sooner than you think.

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