

Avoid gripping to ease finger pain

Q A month ago, I had a sudden pain in the middle finger of my right hand when I got up from bed.

I could not bend it and my whole palm felt numb.

The knuckle and joint of the finger at the palm were very painful when I pressed on them.

The whole finger looked swollen.

During my monthly medical check-up at a GP clinic, I mentioned it to the doctor.

He said this condition is known as "trigger finger".

He prescribed some medicine and said that if there was no relief, I may need an injection and if it is more serious, I may need to undergo a minor surgery.

I am still having this problem.

How did this happen and can acupuncture help?

A Based on the symptoms you have described, you are suffering from acute trigger of your right middle finger.

In trigger finger, there is a narrowing of the sheath that surrounds the tendon in the affected finger due to local inflammation.

As a result, the finger becomes painful, swollen and stiff.

The stiffness tends to be worse after inactivity, such as when one wakes up in the morning but



Those suffering from trigger finger pain should try changing daily activities to reduce gripping or grasping actions for a few weeks.

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improves as one exercises the finger.

The cause is not usually clear.

However, we do know that trigger fingers are more common in women, in people between the ages of 40 and 60 years old and in diabetic patients.

People whose occupation or hobbies require repetitive gripping are also more prone to developing this condition.

In your case, you might want to try modifying your daily activities to avoid repeated gripping or grasping actions for at least a few weeks.

What your GP has given you is, most probably, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs) or acetaminophen, used to relieve pain.

NSAIDs may also reduce the

swelling around the tendon and the tendon sheath. Sometimes, we will prescribe a splint to rest your finger for up to six weeks.

NO QUICK-FIX SOLUTION

Other treatment options include laser therapy, cold compression and even acupuncture but the effectiveness varies between patients. There is little evidence that shows the efficacy of acupuncture in the treatment of trigger finger as it has not been well researched.

My advice is that, be it laser or acupuncture, one should attempt at least five sessions and review the progress regularly to see if the treatment has been effective and is worth continuing. If the symptoms do not improve, we usually recommend

a local steroid injection to reduce inflammation of the tendon sheath.

A maximum of two injections can be given to the same finger at no less than three months apart.

The success rate of this treatment is about 75 per cent.

However, it is important to note that injections are less likely to result in permanent relief if the symptoms have existed for a while or if one has an associated medical condition, such as diabetes.

If there is no relief of the symptoms or the symptoms recur despite the measures above, surgery may be needed.

The procedure is known as "surgical release of the trigger finger".

This is usually performed as day surgery, meaning you can go home on the same day.

Surgery can also be considered for patients seeking quick and definitive relief.



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