

Your Journey with Trigger Finger



For more information scan this QR code or go to myhealth.alberta.ca/trigger-finger-pathway

Trigger finger can occur in one or more of your fingers or thumbs (digits). You might experience a triggering sensation (locking, catching or clicking) when you move the affected digit. Trigger finger may cause pain, and can range from mild to severe (where the digit gets stuck in a bent position).

You are the most important part of your healthcare team. This guide will help you know what to expect as you work with your team to manage and treat your trigger finger. If you have any questions along the way, please ask your healthcare team. Click on the page numbers in blue if you want more information about the step in your journey.

Before your appointment ([page 5](#))

- Write down how you feel, your symptoms, and any questions or concerns.
- Try to remember when you first noticed triggering and pain, and how your symptoms have changed over time.
- Write down things that make your symptoms better and worse.
- Prepare to share any treatments you have tried to help your trigger finger.



Visit your healthcare provider ([page 6](#))

- Your healthcare provider will ask questions about the symptoms you are experiencing and how they impact your day-to-day life.
- Your provider will examine your hands. They will ask about pain and tenderness and watch for any noticeable triggering or locking.
- Your health includes physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, and social elements. To better manage your health condition, your provider needs to hear from you and understand who you are and what matters to you.



Get your tests ([page 7](#))

- Trigger finger is diagnosed by the information you share with your healthcare provider and what they observe during your exam. Additional tests (for example, ultrasounds and x-rays) are not usually required.



Review your treatment & management options ([page 8](#))

- Non-surgical options are rest, steroid injections, and splinting. These are usually tried first to see if they help with your symptoms.
- Symptoms of trigger finger often go away on their own within 3 months by resting the hands. You might be asked to minimize activities (like hobbies).
- Steroid injections are very safe and effective. There is a lifetime maximum of 3 steroid injections per trigger finger.
- Splints that limit the movement of your digit can be used while sleeping to help relieve trigger finger.
- You and your provider will determine which options are best for you.



Talk with your healthcare provider about a referral ([page 9](#))

- You may be referred to a surgeon for assessment and to discuss options that could include steroid injections or surgery.
- Referral to a specialist is based on your symptoms, impacts on your day-to-day life, and how you respond to non-surgical treatment.
- See your healthcare provider as soon as possible if one or more of your digits is stuck in a bent position.



Start your treatment & watch your symptoms ([page 10](#))

- Take an active role in your treatment.
- Write down any changes you notice in your symptoms.



Keep taking care of yourself ([page 11](#))

- Keep taking care of your overall health.
- Look for other resources or supports that may help you.



Whole-person health
([page 2](#))

Important Tips:

Need a family doctor?

ahs.ca/findadoctor

Need a translator or interpreter?

Let your healthcare provider know

Need health advice?

Call Health Link at 811

Need to find programs and resources in your community?

Call 211 or visit ab.211.ca



Primary Care
Alberta

How to use this resource

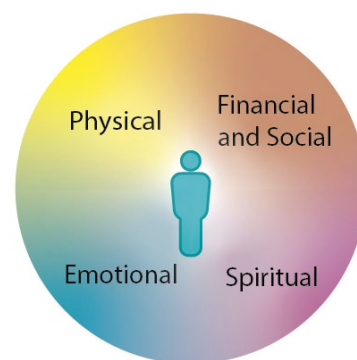
The information provided in this resource is based on validated evidence from a variety of sources, including healthcare professionals in Alberta, peer-reviewed journals, current clinical guidelines, and specialty care recommendations. It is intended as general health information and should not replace the clinical judgment or advice of a qualified healthcare provider. This resource does not address the unique needs of individual patients. Always consult with your healthcare team and follow their recommendations for your specific care.

Whole-person health

The whole-person health approach will help you and your healthcare team better manage your health condition. It is drawn from the teachings of the medicine wheel.

Whole-person health means thinking about all parts of your health and wellness: physical, financial and social, spiritual, and emotional. All of these parts are connected and influence each other. It's important to be aware of your personal needs in each part and to share that information with your healthcare team.

- **Physical:** Your specific health conditions and how well your body works.
- **Financial and social:** Your ability to meet your housing, transportation, food, and health needs, feeling supported to manage your daily life, and having meaningful relationships.
- **Spiritual:** Your beliefs, sense of connection, and purpose.
- **Emotional:** How you think, feel, and cope with life events. Trigger finger can lead to many emotions depending on how much it impacts your daily living. Acknowledge your feelings and talk with a trusted person.



Whole-person health

Whole-person health also reminds us that we are all connected and work together: you, your support systems, and your healthcare providers. Your healthcare providers could be your doctor, nurse practitioner, or a team that comes together with you to plan and organize your care.

Your healthcare provider needs to understand who you are and what matters to you. This helps to build trust. But it can be hard to know what to share or what to say. Try starting by asking yourself:

“What are the things in my life that are important to me?”

“What are the things in my life that may be affecting my health and well-being?”



Bringing forward what matters to you is important. Here are some examples of things you may want to talk about with your healthcare provider:

Physical

“How my hands work is making it hard to take care of myself.”

“My finger gets stuck, and I’m having a hard time dressing myself.”

“My symptoms are making it hard for me to do the things I enjoy.”

Financial and social

“I’m worried I won’t be able to get to all of my appointments.”

“I need my daughter with me as a translator.”

“My hands are making it hard for me to do my job.”

“I can’t take the time away from work to get the treatment”

Emotional

“I’m really frustrated because I can’t do the things I like to do with my fingers like this”

“I’m afraid of needles, and I want to avoid any injections for trigger finger if I can”

“I’m lonely and have no one to talk to.”

Spiritual

“It’s important that I follow traditional healing practices.”

“I’m a believer of natural healing, are there any natural treatments?”

What is trigger finger?

Trigger finger can occur in your fingers or thumbs. In this document, we may sometimes refer to fingers and thumbs as digits.

Your fingers and thumbs move when your muscles pull your tendons back and forth through a tendon sheath (tunnel that the tendons move through). Trigger finger occurs when the tendon and sheath at the base of the finger and thumb (A1 pulley region) gets thicker or swells and the tendon can no longer move freely. You may experience trigger finger in only one finger or thumb, or it may occur in multiple digits.

Trigger finger can range from mild to severe:

- **Mild:** Your finger or thumb locks, clicks, catches, or sticks (this is called triggering), but not very often. Your finger can still be straightened.
- **Moderate:** Triggering happens more often, and your finger or thumb may occasionally get stuck in a bent position.
- **Severe:** Your finger or thumb gets stuck in a bent position often. In the most severe cases, fingers or thumbs cannot fully straighten or bend.

People with trigger finger may experience:

- A bump (nodule) in the palm of the hand near the base of the affected digit.
- Pain and tenderness at the base of the affected digit.
- Triggering: Catching or clicking sensation as the tendon moves in and out of its tendon sheath. While triggering is experienced in the finger or thumb, the problem (nodule) occurs in the palm (A1 pulley region).
- Stiffness or loss of motion.

The exact cause of trigger finger is not known but the condition is more common in people with diabetes, arthritis and other chronic conditions and in those who often perform repetitive motions with their hands like gardening, working with tools and playing an instrument or racket sport. It is also more common in females and in those in their 50s and 60s.

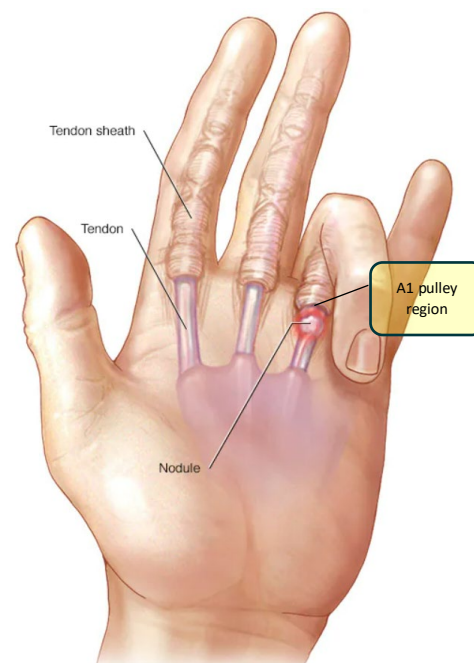


Image adapted from [Mayo Clinic](#)

Before your appointment

Here are a few tips to help you get ready for your appointment with your healthcare provider:

- Consider using a symptom tracker to write down important information to share with your healthcare team about your symptom(s).
 - Try to recall when you first noticed symptoms. Have your symptoms changed over time?
 - Track what makes your trigger finger better or worse throughout the day. For example, are your symptoms worse at a certain time of day or with certain activities (for example, when using tools or equipment). Trigger finger symptoms are often worse when you first wake up and may improve during the day.
 - What you've done to relieve your symptoms and whether it has helped. Ensure you share information about any treatment you may have already received with your healthcare provider.
- Make a list of the prescription and non-prescription (over-the-counter) medicines you use, including any vitamins, herbs, and supplements.
- Ask someone you trust to go with you to your appointment. They can help you ask questions, write down instructions, and remember explanations.



Helpful tools and resources

- **Use a symptom tracker:** hqca.ca/symptom-tracker (Health Quality Council of Alberta)
- To get the most out of your visit, plan to write notes during the visit or see the Alberta Health Services **My Care Conversations app** (ahs.ca/careapp) website for more information about recording your conversation with your healthcare provider.



Healthcare provider's assessment

Trigger finger is diagnosed by your symptoms (what you experience and how long you have had symptoms) and a physical exam. Your healthcare provider will look at and feel your hands. They are looking for signs of triggering and locking and feeling for any bumps (nodules) under the skin. Based on what you tell them, and what they see, your healthcare provider will discuss what options you have for treatment.

What should I watch for (symptoms of concern)?

Watch for and let your healthcare provider know if you have:

- Increasing tenderness at the base of the finger; especially if it starts to impact your daily activities.
- A finger or thumb that becomes stuck in a bent position.

What should I share with my healthcare provider?

- Typical symptoms include a triggering, clicking, or catching sensation when you move your fingers or thumbs. You may also feel pain at the base of the affected finger or thumb.
- Share when you first noticed symptoms, what you felt, what makes it worse, and what makes the symptoms better.
- Trigger finger can occur in multiple digits at the same time. The symptoms in one digit may be more severe than in the others. Share all symptoms if multiple fingers are involved. Your healthcare provider will also examine all your fingers and both thumbs.
- Let your healthcare provider know if you cannot straighten the finger or thumb even with the help of the other hand (this is a locked trigger finger).
- What you have tried to make your symptoms better (for example, pain medications, splinting).
- What impact trigger finger is having on things that are important to you, like your job, hobbies and interests, and relationships?



You are the most important part of your healthcare team.

If you don't understand what your healthcare team is telling you, let them know right away. Be open and honest. You might say:

"This is new to me. Could you please explain it slowly, using language that is easier to understand?"

"It sounded like you said that I should... Did I understand that correctly?"

"Can you show me a picture or model to help me understand?"



Helpful tools and resources

- Making the most of your appointment:
myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=hw226888
- Working with your healthcare team: hqca.ca/info (Health Quality Council of Alberta)



Get your tests

Laboratory or imaging tests (for example, ultrasound or x-rays) are usually not required for trigger finger. Your healthcare provider usually only needs to check your hands and ask questions about your symptoms.

Even though trigger finger doesn't usually require tests, you can access your health records at any time using the resources listed below:

MyHealth Records

See your lab results, immunizations, and some other results with a MyHealth Records account. Sign up at myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords.

MyAHS Connect

See your health information, manage your Alberta Health Services appointments, and interact directly with some members of your healthcare team. Ask your healthcare provider how to access your MyAHS Connect account. Learn more at ahs.ca/myahsconnect.





Review your treatment & management options

The treatments available depend on how long you have had trigger finger symptoms, how severe your symptoms are and what other treatments you have tried. Treatment is most effective when trigger finger is identified and addressed early.

Time and Rest: Mild to moderate trigger fingers often get better by resting your affected hand. During this time, you may be asked to avoid certain activities that may make trigger finger worse. It can take up to three months of avoiding certain activities and rest for symptoms to resolve.

Steroid Injection (Maximum of three injections per digit): Your healthcare provider may refer you to get steroid injections. Steroid injections have a high rate of success for treating trigger finger and can offer permanent symptom relief. For many patients, trigger finger symptoms improve with their first steroid injection. It may take up to two weeks to notice symptom improvement after steroid injection. If the first steroid injection is not effective, up to two more steroid injections per digit can be trialed.

- Waiting three months between steroid injections is recommended.
- The steroids used to treat trigger finger cause minimal side effects.
- Those with diabetes or multiple trigger fingers are less likely to experience symptom relief from steroid injections.

Splinting: Splints that support the digits may improve symptoms associated with trigger finger. Splints should be worn for up to two months while sleeping. Talk with your healthcare provider about what types of splints to use and how to wear them.

Examples of splints for trigger finger are shown below. Splints may be purchased over-the-counter or at a pharmacy or medical supply store (images from Amazon.ca).

Velcro trigger splint	Trigger Oval	Alumifoam trigger splint	MCP extension trigger
			



Asking the following questions can help you make an informed decision about your different treatment options and decide which one(s) will work best for you:

“What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option?”

“Can I use any of these options together?”

“How will this make me feel? Will it have side effects?”

“What results can I expect?”



Talk with your healthcare provider about a referral

You and your healthcare provider may decide that a referral to a hand and wrist surgeon (orthopedic and plastic surgeons with special training in hand and wrist conditions) is needed if your symptoms are severe or treatment has not been effective. You and your healthcare provider may decide to refer you to a specialist while you try other treatments.

- It is important that you continue your treatment such as rest and splinting while waiting to see a specialist. Your healthcare provider may also send you for steroid injection while you are waiting to see a surgeon to see if this improves your symptoms.
- The hand surgeon will meet with you to discuss your health concerns and examine your hands. The surgeon will discuss treatment options with you (including benefits and risks).
- Surgery (trigger finger release) can provide immediate resolution of trigger finger and has minimal risk.

You can find out more about when the right time for a referral is by asking your healthcare provider.



Helpful tools and resources

To learn about how to prepare for your specialist appointment, check out the QuRE Patient and Caregiver Journal by visiting ahs.ca/qure.



Start your treatment & watch your symptoms

As you try the treatment options you chose, remember that if something doesn't work the way you thought it would, think about other options and connect with your healthcare provider to find a treatment that will work for you.

Remember:

- Watch for worsening clicking, catching, or triggering when you move your digits
- Contact your healthcare team if:
 - Hand tenderness prevents you from doing your normal activities
 - Your finger(s) or thumb(s) become stuck in a bent position

Another option for you is to call Health Link at 811 if you have any concerns. You might feel like you don't want to bother your healthcare team, but no detail is too small to share. If it matters to you, it will matter to your healthcare team.

You can clarify with your healthcare team what to expect in terms of follow-up communication.

Call your healthcare team whenever you:

- Have questions
- Notice your symptoms getting worse
- You don't know how to properly wear your splint
- Haven't gotten test results or heard back about an appointment in the time you had agreed to.



Helpful tools and resources

If you can't reach your healthcare provider and need health advice or information, call Health Link anytime, day or night, by dialing **811**.





Supporting whole-person health is important at all times. Many resources are available to help you. See the *Helpful tools and resources* information below.



Helpful tools and resources

Find resources and services in your community:

211 connects Albertans to the programs and resources they need, anytime, day or night. Whether you're looking for help with mental health, financial assistance, basic needs or other challenges, 211 is here to help you find supports. It's free, confidential, and available in over 170 languages by phone, making it easy to access help when you need it.

To connect with **211 Alberta**:

- Call 211
- Text INFO to 211
- Visit ab.211.ca

The **Alberta Healthy Living Program** offers free workshops, classes, and supervised exercise and nutrition services to adults living with a variety of chronic conditions and diseases. Many education classes and workshops are available province wide. Learn more by visiting ahs.ca/ahlp.

Chronic Disease Management support: ahs.ca/cdm

Health Information & Tools: myhealth.alberta.ca/Pages/HealthInfoToolsDefault.aspx



Resources

There's lots of information out there, and it can be confusing to know what information is accurate and true. Here are some great resources that may be helpful for you.

- Visit www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca search for “Trigger Finger” for resources (for example, [Trigger Finger: Care Instructions](#))

Get help now:

- Emergency: Call 911
- Health Link: Call 811

Mental health, addiction, and crisis support:

- 811 or [Addiction Helpline](#): 1-866-332-2322
- 811 or [Mental Health Helpline](#): 1-877-303-2642
- Crisis Text Line: Text CONNECT to 741741
- Crisis Services Canada: Call 988, or visit talksuicide.ca
- Office of Mental Health Patient Advocates: alberta.ca/office-of-alberta-health-advocates.aspx

Helpful tip

If you can't print this resource at home, ask a family member, friend, or your healthcare provider to print it for you. You can also use a computer and printer at your local library.

Community and social supports:

- 211 Alberta: Call 211, or visit ab.211.ca
- Family Violence Info Line: 310-1818, or visit alberta.ca/family-violence-find-supports.aspx
- Income Support: 1-866-644-5135, or visit alberta.ca/income-support.aspx

Alberta Health Services programs:

- Home Care: ahs.ca/homecare
- Find a Dietitian: ahs.ca/nutrition
 - Health Link has dietitians to answer nutrition questions. Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete the self-referral form on ahs.ca/811.
- Spiritual Care Services: ahs.ca/spiritualcare

Primary care (family doctors):

- Find a doctor or nurse practitioner: ahs.ca/findadoctor
- Virtual care guide: ahs.ca/virtualhealth

Patient concerns and feedback:

- Office of Alberta Health Advocates: alberta.ca/office-of-alberta-health-advocates.aspx
 - Offers coaching to help you advocate for yourself in the health system, and support to learn how the health system works and how to navigate through it.
- Alberta Health Services Patient Relations: 1-855-550-2555, or visit ahs.ca/patientfeedback

Important phone numbers

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Notes

Use this space to take your notes.



About this Pathway

The Provincial Pathways Unit co-developed this patient pathway in partnership with:

- Plastic surgery hand and wrist surgeons
- Orthopedic hand and wrist surgeons
- Primary care providers including physicians and nurse practitioners
- Patient and Family Advisors
- Alberta Health Services professionals

It is current as of **April 2025**.

Authors & Conflict of Interest Declaration

This pathway was reviewed and revised by a multi-disciplinary co-design team including specialists and primary care providers from across Alberta. Membership available on request by emailing albertapathways@primarycarealberta.ca.

Pathway Review Process

Primary care pathways undergo scheduled review every three years, or earlier if there is a clinically significant change in knowledge or practice. The next scheduled review is January 2028. However, we welcome feedback at any time. Please send us your [feedback here](#).

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Disclaimer

This pathway represents evidence-based best practice but does not override the individual responsibility of healthcare professionals to make decisions appropriate to their patients using their own clinical judgment given their patients' specific clinical conditions, in consultation with patients/alternate decision makers. The pathway is not a substitute for clinical judgment or advice of a qualified healthcare professional. It is expected that all users will seek advice of other appropriately qualified and regulated healthcare providers with any issues transcending their specific knowledge, scope of regulated practice or professional competence.

