

Mallet Finger

Diagnosis Explanation:

Mallet finger occurs when the **extensor tendon at the tip of the finger (DIP joint) is torn or ruptured**, causing an **inability to straighten the fingertip**. This injury typically results from a **direct blow to the tip of the finger**, such as catching a ball or hitting an object.

Symptoms:

- **Drooping fingertip** that cannot be actively straightened.
- **Pain, swelling, and bruising** at the DIP joint.
- **Tenderness over the back of the fingertip.**
- **Possible nail bed injuries** or avulsion fractures (small bone fragments pulled off by the tendon).

Specific Work Modifications:

- **If your job involves typing or writing:** Use **voice dictation software** or a **splinted finger rest** while typing.
- **If your job requires manual labor:** Avoid **gripping, pulling, or lifting heavy objects** with the injured hand.
- **If your job is desk-based:** Use a **soft keyboard rest**, keep the **hand elevated**, and take **frequent breaks**.
- **Avoid:** Repetitive hand use, forceful gripping, and applying pressure to the injured finger.

Specific Activity Modifications:

- **If you play sports:** Avoid **ball-handling sports (basketball, baseball, volleyball) and contact sports** until cleared for return.
- **If you play an instrument:** Modify technique to accommodate the splint and prevent strain.
- **If you do crafting, gardening, or cooking:** Use **larger-handled tools** to reduce finger strain.
- **Avoid:** Repetitive gripping, excessive finger flexion, and weight-bearing activities on the affected hand.

Recommended Supplements:

- **Collagen Peptides** - 10g daily for tendon and joint repair.
- **Vitamin C** - 500mg daily to support collagen synthesis.
- **Glucosamine & Chondroitin** - 1500mg/1200mg daily for joint and tendon health.

- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids** - 1000mg daily to reduce inflammation.
- **Turmeric (Curcumin)** - 500-1000mg daily for pain relief.

Recommended Nutrition and Hydration:

- **Increase Lean Protein** (chicken, fish, tofu, eggs) to aid tendon healing.
- **Eat Anti-Inflammatory Foods** (berries, leafy greens, turmeric, nuts) to reduce swelling.
- **Consume Hydrating Foods** (cucumber, watermelon, citrus) to maintain joint lubrication.
- **Limit Processed Foods & Sugars** to prevent inflammation.
- **Hydration:** Drink **8-10 cups of water daily** to support tendon recovery.

Home Exercise Prescription (Rehabilitation for Mallet Finger)

Early Phase (0-6 Weeks, Immobilization & Healing):

- **Splinting** - Wear a **DIP extension splint full-time for 6-8 weeks** to allow tendon healing.
- **RICE Protocol** - Rest, Ice (15-20 min, 3x/day), Compression, Elevation.
- **Avoid Finger Bending** - Keep the splint in place to prevent re-injury.

Strengthening Phase (6-8 Weeks, Improving Mobility & Function):

- **Gentle Passive DIP Flexion** - Remove splint (as directed), slowly bend fingertip with other hand, **hold 5 seconds, repeat 10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Isometric Finger Extension** - Place hand flat, try to lift the fingertip (without resistance), **hold 5 seconds, repeat 10 reps, 2x/day**.

Advanced Phase (8+ Weeks, Preventing Recurrence & Restoring Strength):

- **Soft Ball Squeeze** - Gently squeeze a soft ball **5 seconds, repeat 10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Rubber Band Finger Extensions** - Wrap a rubber band around fingers, extend hand against resistance, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Finger-to-Thumb Opposition** - Touch thumb to each fingertip, **10 reps, 2x/day**.

Helpful Books:

1. *The Hand and Wrist Pain Solution: Simple Exercises for Relief* - Dr. Ross Clifford.
2. *Arthritis and Hand Therapy: A Self-Help Guide to Managing Joint Pain* - Susan J. Barnhart, PT.

Click here for more orthopedic patient information.

Contact a Key West orthopedic clinic or reach out to Dr. Jason Pirozzolo.