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Finger Fractures

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Although the bones in the hand are small, a broken (fractured) finger is not a minor injury. The bones in a normal hand line up precisely. They let you perform many specialized functions, such as grasping a pen or manipulating small objects in your palm. When you fracture a finger bone, it can cause your whole hand to be out of alignment. Without treatment, your broken finger might stay stiff and painful.

Anatomy

Your hand consists of 27 bones: eight bones in your wrist (carpals), five bones in the palm of your hand (metacarpals), and 14 bones in your fingers (phalanges). Fractures of the metacarpal bone that leads to the little finger account for about one-third of all hand fractures in adults.

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Cause

Generally, a fractured finger occurs as the result of an injury to the hand. You can fracture a finger when you slam your fingers in a door, when you put out your hand to break a fall, or when your finger jams while trying to catch a ball. Carelessness when working with power saws, drills, and other tools can result in a fractured finger.

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Symptoms

- Swelling of the fracture site
- Tenderness at the fracture site
- Bruising at the fracture site
- Inability to move the injured finger in completely
- Deformity of the injured finger

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Doctor Examination

If you think you fractured your finger, immediately tell your doctor exactly what happened and when it happened. Your doctor must determine not only which bone you fractured, but also how the bone broke. Bones can break in several ways: straight across the bone, in a spiral, into several pieces, or shatter completely.

Your doctor may want to see how your fingers line up when you extend your hand or make a fist. Does any finger overlap its neighbor? Does the injured finger angle in the wrong direction? Does the injured finger look too short? Your doctor may x-ray both of your hands to compare the injured finger to the uninjured finger on your other hand.

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Treatment

Nonsurgical Treatment

Your doctor will put your broken bone back into place, usually without surgery. You will get a splint or cast to hold your finger straight and protect it from further injury while it heals. Sometimes your doctor may splint the fingers next to the fractured one to provide additional support. Your doctor will tell you how long to wear the splint. Usually a splint on a fractured finger is worn for about 3 weeks. You may need more x-rays over this time so that your doctor can monitor the progress of your finger as it heals.

Surgical Treatment

Depending on the type and severity of the fracture, you may need surgery to put the bones into alignment. Small devices, such as pins, screws, or wire, will be used to hold your fractured bones together.

Parts of the Body

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- Hand & Wrist
- Hip & Thigh
- Knee & Lower Leg
- Foot & Ankle
- Neck & Back

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Rehabilitation

You may begin using your hand again as soon as your doctor determines it is okay to move your finger. Doing simple rehabilitation exercises each day will help reduce the finger's stiffness and swelling. You may be required to see a physical therapist to assist you in these exercises.

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