



MALLET FINGER

You have had an injury to the extensor tendon of your finger. The tendon has either been torn from the bone where it attaches to the base of the distal phalanx, or it has pulled a fragment (*avulsion*) off the bone. The result is that you are unable to actively extend your finger at the distal joint, although your finger remains flexible and can be passively extended to a normal position. Often there is little or no pain with this injury.

If your injury does not heal properly, your finger will not regain its' full range of motion and may become more painful. It is **ESSENTIAL** that the ruptured end of the extensor tendon be brought back into place at the base of the distal phalanx by immobilizing the finger in a position of extension at the distal interphalangeal joint (*DIP*), and preventing the joint from flexing throughout the immobilization period. It must not be allowed to bend even for a moment,

Usually the finger can be immobilized in the correct position by the use of a splint that crosses the distal joint. The splint is more comfortable when worn on top, rather than the palm side, of the finger because it allows you to use the hand more freely. Your finger will need to be splinted compulsively for 6—12 weeks.

The key to successful healing is to keep the joint from flexing (*bending/drooping*) at all times. This may be difficult when you are changing the splint. However, you must be sure to protect the healing tendon or bone by passively holding the joint fully extended while making the changes. Never allow the fingertip to bend!! You may shower or bathe while wearing the splint as long as you change it afterwards if it is wet. Otherwise, cover your hand in a secure plastic bag to keep the splint dry-while bathing. If you are unable to keep your finger straight while changing the splint, as someone to help you. If you need to change the moleskin on your splint, be sure to peel off all existing moleskin, so the splint is only metal. Then apply new, clean moleskin to cover the metal. Do not just add more moleskin on top of your existing splint

When your splint is applied correctly, your nail should be touching the splint and not drooping away from it.

After 6—8 weeks, you will return to the office for evaluation. Under the best of circumstances, the tendon reattaches to the bone and you will have full motion and function of the finger. Occasionally healing is not achieved after conservative treatment and an operation may be necessary to repair the tendon or bone.

If you have any questions regarding your injury or treatment, please call (617) 965-4263

