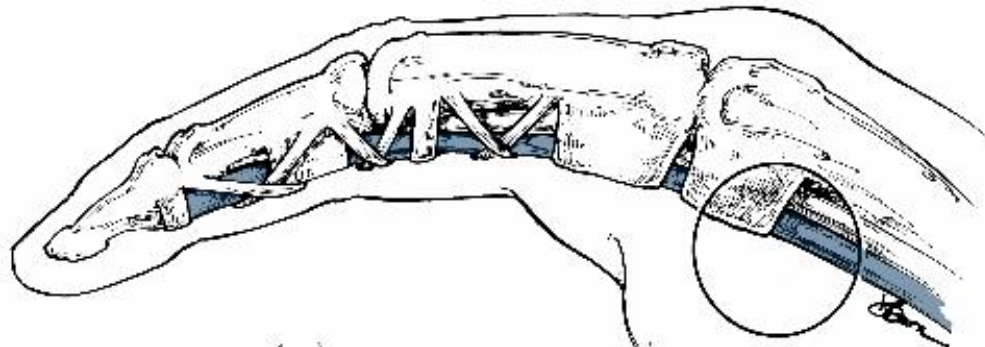
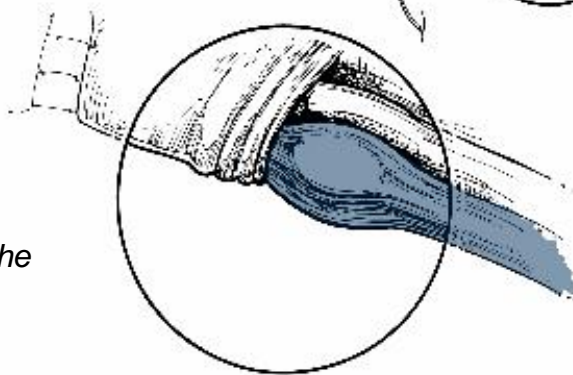


**STENOSING TENOSYNOVITIS, or TRIGGER FINGER** (or thumb) is a condition that causes the tendons in the hand to click (trigger) when you bend (flex) your fingers. In severe cases the tendon can become trapped, locking your finger in place. Tendons are structures that connect the muscles in the forearm to the bones in the fingers and thumb. In the palm, these flexor tendons pass through tunnels, or flexor sheaths, which keep the tendons next to the bone much like the rings on a fishing pole keep the line next to the rod. When a muscle contracts, it pulls the tendon through these tunnels (Fig. 1). Normally, the tendon fits perfectly through the sheath.

**Fig. 1** The flexor tendon can be pulled through the flexor sheath easily in a healthy fin.



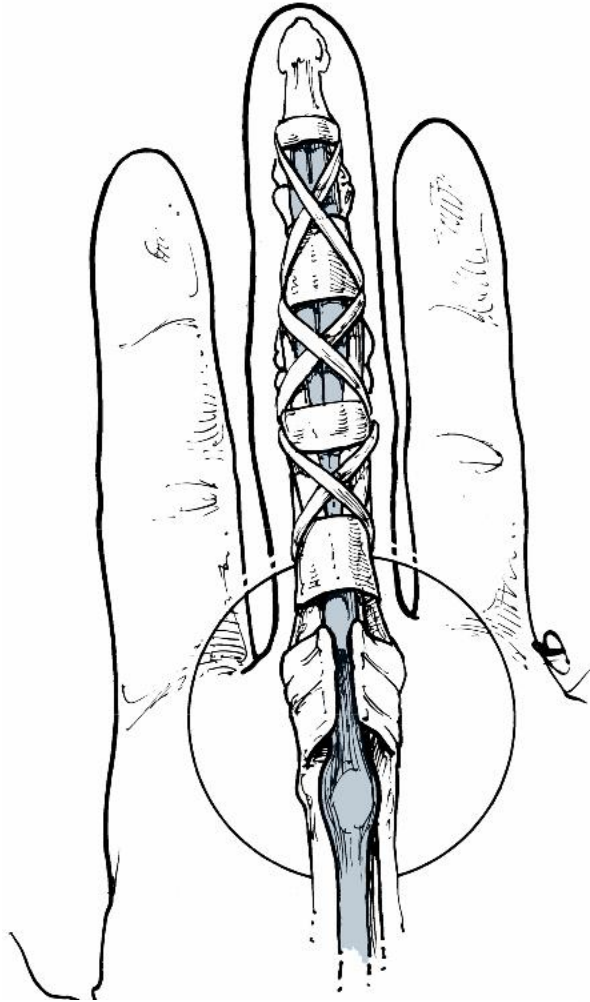
**Fig. 2** The knot in the flexor tendon cannot move under the flexor sheath, which causes the finger to lock.



When a tendon becomes inflamed, it can develop a swelling or knot and have difficulty moving through the narrow flexor sheath (Fig. 2). A popping or catching sensation occurs in the finger or thumb as the swollen tendon moves back and forth through the tunnel. The more the tendon pops, or triggers, the more inflamed it becomes. The more inflamed the tendon becomes, the more it triggers. If the tendon becomes too swollen to slide through the tunnel, your finger or thumb can lock in a bent or straight position and be difficult to move.

**Causes.** There are many factors that can cause trigger finger. Grasping an object over and over or injuring your palm might irritate the flexor tendons. Also, diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis, gout, and diabetes, can cause the symptoms.

**Symptoms.** The first symptom of trigger finger you might notice is pain in your palm or at the base of the thumb. The condition progresses and your finger or thumb begins to trigger. You will notice a clicking or snapping sensation in your palm or finger. The fingers most commonly affected are the ring and middle fingers and the thumb.



**Fig. 3** The sheath over the flexor tendon is cut open. Once the flexor sheath is opened, the swollen tendon can move freely because it no longer has to fit through the tight sheath, so swelling in the tendon will decrease.

**Treatment.** To correct trigger finger (or trigger thumb), the doctor must reduce swelling around the flexor tendon. To reduce swelling, you might have to take anti-inflammatory medicines, such as aspirin or ibuprofen. Often a cortisone (a strong anti-inflammatory medicine) injection will reduce or eliminate trigger finger. Changes in daily activities, such as putting less strain on the affected area or decreasing activities that require repeated motion with the hand, can often help to decrease the pain. You might need surgery if other treatments do not work. Surgery can usually be done on an outpatient basis, which means you do not have to spend the night in the hospital after surgery. The doctor releases (cuts open) the flexor sheath that covers the inflamed, triggering tendon (Fig. 3). Once the flexor sheath is opened, the swollen tendon can move freely because it no longer has to fit through the tight sheath, and the swelling will decrease. The recovery period differs for each person. Immediately after surgery, you begin exercises to regain full motion in your finger or thumb. You will probably wear a splint temporarily at night to keep the finger straight. You can use the hand normally when movement of the finger or thumb is comfortable.

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