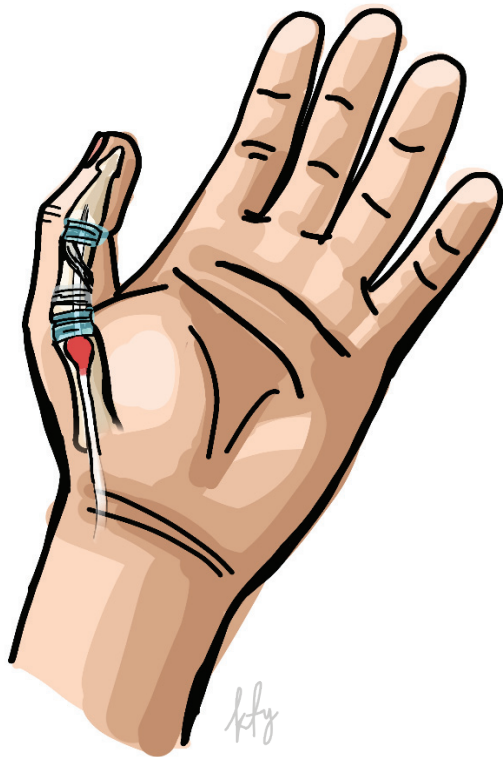


## Occupational Therapy for Trigger Thumb



## **WHAT IS TRIGGER THUMB?**

Trigger thumb is a condition where there is locking or clicking of the affected thumb. When you bend your thumb, the tendon will slide through a tight tunnel (pulley). If the tendon becomes inflamed or if the tunnel thickens, the tendon cannot slide through the tunnel smoothly. This causes pain, triggering or locking of the thumb.

## **WHAT CAUSES TRIGGER THUMB?**

- Engagement in activities that involve excessive repetitive grasping, pinching or wringing
- Prolonged firm contact of the hand while using tools such as screwdrivers and power drills
- Changes in connective tissue as associated with hormonal changes, rheumatoid arthritis, gout, or diabetes

## **WHAT ARE THE TREATMENTS AVAILABLE?**

### **Conservative Management**

Your doctor may refer you to an occupational therapist for hand therapy to manage your symptoms and improve your ability to perform your daily activities by:

- Educating you on activity modification techniques that encourage rest and recovery of the affected thumb
- Fitting you with splints / orthosis to rest the affected thumb
- Teaching you exercises that facilitate thumb movements

If the pain and symptoms persist after a few months of hand therapy, a corticosteroid injection may be advised by the doctor.

### **Surgical Management**

Surgical release of the tendon sheath may be advised by the doctor, if conservative management fails to alleviate symptoms.

## ACTIVITY MODIFICATION PRINCIPLES

Modifying the way you use your hands in daily activities may help to reduce pain intensity and prevent future onset of this condition in other fingers.

To begin, identify and reflect on the daily activities which will involve excessive and prolonged thumb motion and forceful pinching.

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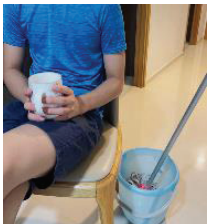
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You may adopt the following **Activity Modification Principles** to allow rest and recovery at your affected thumb.

**Scan the QR code to find out more:**



Using the activity of floor mopping as an example, you are applying the Activity Modification Principles when you use:

	<p><b>REMOVE</b> by engaging others to complete the task</p> <p>For example: Get assistance from a family member or a robot vacuum to mop the floor</p>
	<p><b>REPLACE</b> by using alternative methods to complete the task</p> <p>For example: Use a spin bucket to squeeze dry the head of the mop or use disposable wet wipes to clean the floor</p>
	<p><b>REDUCE</b> the frequency, duration and compressive forces when performing tasks</p> <p>For example: Reduce the number of days that you mop the floor and wrap the mop stick with non-slip mat to cushion the grip</p>
	<p><b>REST</b> by taking regular breaks in between tasks or break tasks up into different parts.</p> <p>For example: Take short rest breaks after mopping each room</p>

**Pen down some ways by which you can apply the Activity Modification Principles to two of the activities that you have identified earlier.**

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### **SPLINT / ORTHOSIS WEARING REGIME**

The use of splint / orthosis helps to limit your thumb movement, which in turn allows the inflamed tendon to rest. This further reduces irritation and the resultant pain.

For the best result, the splint / orthosis should be worn at all times for at least 3 weeks. For more severe cases, your occupational therapist may advise you to wear the splint for a longer duration of between 6 and 8 weeks.




The splint / orthosis can be removed for the following activities:

- Simple self-care activities such as hand hygiene, showering and feeding
- Performing home exercise programme for the affected thumb

## HOME EXERCISES


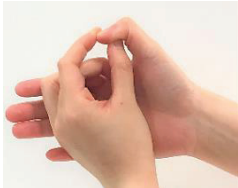

### Massage

- Massage the pulley area for 3 to 5 minutes, 3 to 4 times a day

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feel for a nodule at the base of your thumb</li><li>• Massage in a transverse left and right direction</li></ul>
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### Passive Stretch

- Keep the affected thumb relaxed, and use the other hand to gently stretch the thumb
- Do 10 repetitions, hold each stretch for 10 seconds, 3 to 4 times a day

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Straighten the affected thumb and pull it backwards</li></ol>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2. Bend the 1st joint of the affected thumb. Ensure there is no active triggering.</li></ol>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>3. Bend the 1st and 2nd joints of the affected thumb into your palm. Ensure there is no active triggering.</li></ol>

## Blocking Exercises

- Perform within pain-free limit. Ensure that there is no active triggering.
- Do 10 repetitions, 3 to 4 times a day

	<p>1. Using the other hand to support the affected thumb beneath the 1st thumb joint, slowly bend and straighten the 1st joint.</p>
	<p>2. Use the other hand to support the affected thumb beneath the 2nd thumb joint, keeping the 1st joint relaxed, slowly bend and straighten the 2nd joint.</p>

**Scan the QR code to find out more:**

<p>Home Exercise and Splinting</p>
 <small><a href="https://on.sg/4zz69">https://on.sg/4zz69</a></small>

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This patient information leaflet was jointly created by Occupational Therapy from National University Hospital, Ng Teng Fong General Hospital and Alexandra Hospital.

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