T
rigger finger is a condition that affects the tendons in your fingers or thumb. Ten-
dons are tissues that connect muscles to bone. When muscles contract, tendons pull on bones. This is what causes some parts of the body to move. The flexor tendon can become ir-
ritated as it slides through the ten-
don sheath tunnel in the palm. As it be-
comes more and more irritated, the tendon may thicken and nodules may form, making its passage through the tunnel more difficult. If you have trigger finger, the ten-
don becomes momentarily stuck at the mouth of the tendon sheath tun-
nel when you try to straighten your finger. You might feel a pop as the tendon slips through the tight area and your finger will suddenly shoot straight out.

Symptoms of trigger finger usually start without any injury, although they may follow a period of heavy hand use. Symptoms may include:

- A tender lump in your palm
- Swelling
- Catching or popping sensation in your finger or thumb joints
- Pain when bending or straight-
ening your finger

Stiffness and catching tend to be worse after inactivity, such as when you wake in the morning. Your fin-
gers will often loosen up as you move them. In severe cases of trigger finger, the finger cannot be straight-
ened, even with help. Sometimes, one or more fingers are affected. Your Orthopaedic Clinic doctor can diagnose the problem by talking with you and examining your hand. No other testing or x-rays are usually needed to diagnose trigger finger.

If symptoms are mild, resting the finger may be enough to resolve the problem. Over-the-counter pain med-
ications, such as non-steroidal anti-in-
flammatory medicines (NSAIDS) or acetaminophen can be used to relieve the pain. Your doctor may choose to inject a corticosteroid — a powerful anti-inflammatory medication — into the tendon sheath. In some cases, this improves the problem only tem-
porarily, and another injection is needed. If one-two injections fail to resolve the problem, surgery should be considered. Injections are less likely to pro-
vide permanent relief if you have had the triggering for a long time, or if you have an associated medical problem, like diabetes.

Trigger finger is not a dangerous condition. The decision to have sur-
gery is a personal one, based on how severe your symptoms are and whether nonsurgical options have failed. In addition, if your finger is stuck in a bent position, your doctor may recommend surgery to prevent permanent stiffness.

The surgery for trigger finger is very successful and performed on an outpatient basis. It is done through just a small incision in the palm. The tendon sheath is opened so that the tendon has more room to move through it. Most people are able to move their fingers immediately after surgery. It is common to have some soreness in your palm. Frequently raising your hand above your heart can help reduce swelling and pain. Recovery is usually complete within a few weeks, but it may take up to 6 months for all swelling and stiffness to go away.