SYMPTOM

Finger pain

Finger pain is aching, soreness, or sharp discomfort in one or more fingers.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Aching, throbbing, burning, stiffness, or sharp pain with movement

WHERE IT IS FELT
Fingers, finger joints, fingertips, or skin around the nails

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Minor injury, overuse, osteoarthritis

WHEN IT IS URGENT
New redness, heat, swelling, or trouble moving a finger

USUALLY LASTS
Days after minor strain; longer with joint or tendon conditions

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Pain persists, returns, or limits normal hand use

Overview

Finger pain can affect a fingertip, joint, tendon, nail, or an entire finger. It may start suddenly after an injury or develop gradually with repeated hand use.

Pain can arise from the finger's bones, joints, tendons, ligaments, nerves, blood vessels, skin, or nails. Most mild cases improve with simple care, but pain with marked swelling, poor circulation, infection, or a serious injury needs prompt assessment.

What it may feel or look like

Finger pain may feel sharp, dull, burning, throbbing, or tender. It may occur when you bend, straighten, grip, or press on the finger. Other symptoms can include:

Pain at one joint may come from an injury or arthritis. Burning or tingling can suggest nerve irritation in the finger, hand, wrist, or arm. Persistent symptoms need assessment.

- Swelling, bruising, redness, or warmth
- Stiffness or reduced movement

- Clicking, catching, or locking
- Tingling, numbness, or unusual sensitivity
- A lump near a joint or tendon
- Nail changes or pus
- A finger that looks bent, rotated, pale, or blue

Common causes

Minor injuries and overuse include sprains, bruises, repetitive gripping, typing, tool use, and sports activity. A fracture can sometimes look like a sprain.

Osteoarthritis can cause aching, stiffness, swelling, or firm bumps around finger joints. Symptoms may worsen after heavy use or rest.

Tendon problems make movement painful. Trigger finger causes clicking, catching, or locking when a tendon does not glide smoothly.

Skin and nail problems include cuts, splinters, and infection around a nail. Biting nails or pulling hangnails can allow infection to enter damaged skin.

Other causes include inflammatory arthritis, gout, cysts, and nerve compression. More urgent possibilities include a deep infection, an infected joint or tendon, a displaced fracture, or impaired blood flow.

When to seek medical care

Go to an emergency department now if:

Arrange same-day medical care if a finger becomes red, hot, swollen, and difficult to move, especially with pus, fever, spreading redness, or red streaks. Also seek prompt care for a human or animal bite, deep puncture, or sudden severe joint pain and swelling.

Book a routine appointment if pain is not improving, keeps returning, disturbs sleep, or limits normal activities. Persistent numbness, locking, weakness, joint swelling, or morning stiffness also needs assessment.

- A finger is suddenly pale, blue, cold, or numb
- A ring is trapped on a rapidly swelling finger and cannot be removed
- The finger is badly deformed, partly amputated, or has exposed bone

- Bleeding is heavy or does not stop with firm pressure
- A deep wound may have damaged a tendon, nerve, or blood vessel

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional will ask when the pain began, whether there was an injury, which movements worsen it, and whether you have repeated hand use, other painful joints, medical conditions, or recent cuts or bites.

The examination checks tenderness, swelling, movement, joint stability, sensation, and blood flow. Finger position when making a fist can reveal rotation after a fracture.

An X-ray may be needed after injury or when arthritis is suspected. Ultrasound or other scans can examine tendons and soft tissues. Blood tests or joint fluid analysis may be used when infection, gout, or inflammatory arthritis is possible.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause.

For a mild injury without deformity, numbness, or an open wound, reduce activities that trigger pain. Raise the hand when practical and apply a wrapped cold pack for short periods during the first day or two. Remove rings early if swelling begins.

Do not force a stiff, locked, or injured finger straight. Splints or "buddy taping" may help some injuries, but incorrect positioning can worsen stiffness or conceal a significant injury. Ask a healthcare professional if you are unsure.

Non-prescription acetaminophen or an anti-inflammatory medicine may help. Follow package directions and ask a pharmacist if the medicine is suitable for you, especially if you have other health conditions, take regular medicines, or are pregnant.

Medical treatment may include a splint or cast for a fracture, antibiotics or drainage for infection, or exercises and hand therapy. Arthritis and tendon conditions may require activity changes, medicines, injections, or occasionally surgery.

What to expect

A mild strain or bruise often begins to improve within several days, although tenderness and stiffness may last longer. Fractures, tendon injuries, arthritis, and nerve problems can take

weeks or longer.

Finger joints stiffen easily. Once serious injury has been excluded, safe movement and recommended exercises can support recovery. Seek follow-up if symptoms worsen or improvement stops.

Common questions

Could finger pain be arthritis?

Yes, but arthritis is only one possibility. Ongoing stiffness, swelling, or bony enlargement may suggest arthritis, while sudden pain after an impact is more likely to be an injury.

Why does my finger click or lock?

A tendon may be catching as it moves through its surrounding tunnel, as in trigger finger. Joint problems and injuries can also affect movement. Arrange an assessment if locking continues or you need the other hand to straighten the finger.

Can finger pain come from a nerve?

Yes. Nerve irritation can cause burning, tingling, numbness, or electric-shock sensations. The source may be in the finger, hand, wrist, or farther up the arm.

Should I remove my rings?

Remove rings as soon as swelling starts. A tight ring can impair blood flow and become difficult to remove. Seek urgent help if the finger becomes pale, blue, cold, or numb.

Sources

- NHS: Finger pain
- MedlinePlus: Finger injuries and disorders , U.S. National Library of Medicine
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- Kolasinski SL, Neogi T, Hochberg MC, et al. "2019 American College of Rheumatology/Arthritis Foundation Guideline for the Management of Osteoarthritis of the Hand, Hip, and Knee." Arthritis Care & Research . 2020;72(2):149-162.