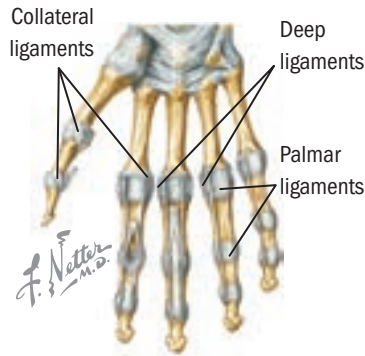


# MANAGING YOUR FINGER SPRAIN



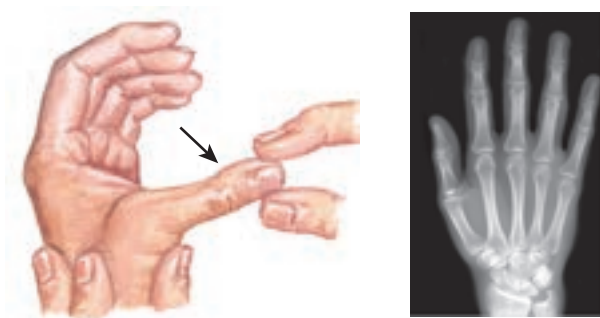
Sprains are injuries in which ligaments are stretched or torn. Fingers and thumbs can suffer sprains by being bent in an odd way, usually during a fall on an outstretched hand. Thumb sprains involving collateral (side) ligaments may be called skier's thumb.



Accidents in sports can cause sprains, as when balls hit fingers in football or basketball, or sticks (as in hockey) force fingers to bend. Hard falls can also cause sprains.



Symptoms include pain over the joint in the finger, pain when bending the finger, joint swelling, tenderness, and restricted finger movement. A popping or tearing feeling inside the finger may occur.



Your health care provider makes the diagnosis from an examination of the finger and x-rays to make sure that bones aren't broken. MRI may help with diagnosis of certain injuries of collateral ligaments.

## What Are Finger Sprains?

Sprains are injuries in which ligaments are stretched or torn. Ligaments are tough, fibrous bands of tissue connecting bones. Fingers and thumbs can suffer sprains by being bent in an odd way, commonly during a fall on an outstretched hand. Sprains are common in ball games (such as football, basketball, and handball) and games involving sticks or rackets (such as hockey and lacrosse). Thumb sprains involving collateral (side) ligaments may be called skier's (or gamekeeper's) thumb.

## What Causes Finger Sprains?

Accidents in sports can cause sprains, as when balls hit fingers in ball games, or sticks (as in hockey) forcefully bend fingers. Forceful falls can also cause sprains. People with previous finger injuries, poor strength and flexibility, and poorly fitting or inadequate protective equipment may have greater risk of sprained fingers.

## What Are the Symptoms of Finger Sprains?

Symptoms include pain over the joint in the finger, pain when bending the finger, joint swelling, tenderness, and restricted finger movement. A popping or tearing feeling inside the finger may occur. Severe injuries or complete tears of the ligament can cause an unstable finger.

## How Are Finger Sprains Diagnosed?

The health care provider makes a diagnosis from an examination of the finger and sometimes x-rays to make sure that bones aren't broken (fractured). Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) may help with diagnosis of certain injuries of collateral ligaments.



First treatments include RICE: rest, ice, compression, and elevating the hand, such as on pillows.



Anti-inflammatory drugs (ibuprofen, aspirin) or other medicines (acetaminophen) can reduce pain and inflammation.



To support sprained fingers, they can be buddy taped to other fingers, or splints can be used for a brief time.



Exercises such as ball squeezing, finger extension, and fist making can help fingers get stronger during healing. Physical therapy can help stiff joints move better.



Don't put ice directly on skin. Wrap it in a towel or use an ice pack.

## How Are Finger Sprains Treated?

Treatment goals are to reduce pain and swelling and help people return to sports or activities as soon as safely possible. First treatments include RICE: rest, ice, compression, and elevating the hand. Ice packs can be put on the finger for 15 to 20 minutes, four times a day, until swelling and pain are gone. Putting the hand on a pillow to raise it for 2 days can also help swelling go away. Anti-inflammatory drugs (ibuprofen, aspirin) or other medicines (acetaminophen) can reduce pain and inflammation. To support sprained fingers, they can be taped to other fingers (buddy taped) or splints can be put on the finger. Splinting that prevents movement too long can make fingers stiffen, however. Thumb sprains (skier's thumb) may need longer immobilization, especially if a ligament may have been torn, and sometimes surgery to repair the damage. Sprained fingers can be swollen and have reduced movement and strength for weeks or even months, but without joint dislocation or broken bones, symptoms may go away in 1 to 3 weeks. Returning to activities too soon may worsen the injury and lead to permanent damage, but in some cases the finger may be protected for early return.

Exercises such as ball squeezing and finger extension can help fingers get stronger during healing. Physical therapy can help stiff joints move better.

## DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Finger Sprains:

- ✓ **DO** use ice and elevation to keep swelling down.
- ✓ **DO** exercises (ball squeezing, finger extension, passive range of motion) to help your finger get stronger during healing.
- ✓ **DO** take medicines as directed.
- ✓ **DO** learn and use the right sports techniques and equipment.
- ✓ **DO** use support, like buddy taping, to protect healing ligaments, especially with early return to activity.
- ⊗ **DON'T** return to activities too soon. Your injury can get worse.
- ⊗ **DON'T** wrap your finger too tightly, or it may cut off circulation.
- ⊗ **DON'T** put ice directly on skin. Wrap it in a towel.

### FROM THE DESK OF

### NOTES

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### Contact the following sources:

• American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons  
Tel: (847) 823-7186

Website: <http://www.aaos.org>

• The American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine  
Tel: (847) 292-4900

Website: <http://www.sportsmed.org>