INFORMATION AND EXERCISES

Hand Therapy: Finger Exercises

Getting the movement and strength back after a finger injury

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After a finger injury, the finger is often stiff, swollen and weak. Once Dr Malik has said that you can move it freely, these exercises help it bend, straighten and grip again. This sheet explains what to expect and how to look after your hand, and sets out the exercises step by step.

MOVEMENT EXERCISES	STRENGTH EXERCISES	SWELLING	RECOVERY
3 times a day	Once a day, when advised	Keep the hand raised	Weeks to months

After a finger injury

Each finger bends and straightens at three joints: the knuckle where it joins the hand, the middle joint and the end joint. Long tendons move the joints, gliding along the finger like cords in a sleeve, and small muscles in the hand spread the fingers and steady them.

After an injury, swelling, pain and a time of rest allow the joints and tendons to stiffen, and the muscles of the hand become weak. Moving the finger is the best way to get the movement back: it keeps the tendons gliding, helps the swelling go down and stops the joints from setting stiff. Strength comes back more slowly, with exercise and with everyday use of the hand.

This sheet is for any finger injury, such as a broken finger, a dislocated or sprained finger joint, or a finger that has needed an operation, once Dr Malik has said that you can move it freely. If you have been told to keep a finger still, or to protect it in a splint, follow that advice until Dr Malik says otherwise. The sheet is for adults and children: a child may need a parent or carer to help with the exercises, and to remind them to do them.

It is normal for the finger to feel stiff, especially in the morning, and for the joint to stay swollen for some time. Some discomfort while you exercise is expected, and does not mean you are harming the finger.

What helps most

- Moving the finger little and often through the day, rather than a lot at once.
- Using your hand for light everyday tasks, such as eating, dressing, washing and writing.
- Keeping the swelling down, especially in the first few weeks.
- Building up the strength gradually, once Dr Malik says that you can start the strength exercises.
- Patience: the finger keeps improving for months, and the exercises work best when you keep them up.

Keeping the swelling down

- When you are resting, keep your hand raised, higher than your elbow, with your elbow higher than your heart: rest it on pillows when you sit or lie down.
- While the hand is raised, open it wide and close it into a fist, slowly, 10 times, several times a day.
- Gently massage the finger from the tip towards the hand, with a little unperfumed cream, for a few minutes.
- Take rings off the injured hand, and do not wear a ring on the injured finger until the swelling has gone.
- If you have been given a close-fitting glove or finger sleeve to reduce the swelling, wear it as advised.

Easing stiffness and pain

- Warm your hand in warm, not hot, water for 5 to 10 minutes before you exercise: it eases the stiffness. If the finger feels numb, test the water with your other hand first.
- If the finger is sore or swollen after exercising, an ice pack wrapped in a thin towel, held on it for up to 15 minutes, can ease it.
- Painkilling tablets, taken as prescribed by Dr Malik, can ease the pain enough to keep you exercising.

> **If the pain or swelling does not settle, or you are worried about your finger, contact the clinic on +91 99197 03477.**

If you have a scar

- Once the wound has healed and any stitches are out, massage the scar firmly with an unperfumed cream, in small circles along it, for a few minutes, 2 to 3 times a day. This softens the scar and helps the skin move freely over the tendons.
- If the scar is very sensitive, touch and rub it often with different textures, from soft to rough, for example cotton wool, then a soft cloth, then a towel. It usually becomes less sensitive with time.
- Protect a new scar from strong sun.

Splints and strapping

- If you have been given a splint, wear it only as advised, for example at night, and take it off for your exercises unless you have been told otherwise.
- If the injured finger is strapped to the finger next to it (buddy strapping), you can do the exercises with the strapping on, unless you have been told otherwise.
- Put a thin piece of padding between the strapped fingers, keep the skin dry, and change the strapping if it becomes wet or loose. Check the skin every day for soreness or redness.

Contact the clinic if

- The finger is no better after a few weeks of doing the exercises regularly, or it is becoming stiffer.
- When you make a fist, the injured finger crosses over or under the finger next to it.
- The finger clicks, catches or locks when you bend or straighten it.
- You have numbness or tingling in the finger that is not getting better.
- The pain is much worse than you would expect, and the hand becomes very sensitive to touch, or changes colour, temperature or sweating.

CONTACT THE CLINIC URGENTLY IF

- You felt a sudden snap, and the finger can no longer bend or straighten fully on its own.
- The finger becomes hot, red and swollen, a wound leaks pus, or you feel feverish or unwell.
- The finger turns pale, blue or cold, or loses its feeling.
- You have injured the finger again, with new pain, swelling or a change in its shape.

Clinic: +91 99197 03477.

How to do the programme

- Do Part 1 three times a day, for example in the morning, the afternoon and the evening. Exercise all your fingers, not just the injured one.
- Do Part 2 three times a day too, straight after Part 1. It matters most for a finger that is stiff.
- Do Part 3 once a day, but only when Dr Malik or your therapist says that you can start. Start gently, and build up as the finger gets stronger.
- Move slowly and smoothly, as far as you comfortably can, and hold each position for the time shown. A feeling of stretch or tightness is normal.
- Between exercise sessions, use your hand for light everyday tasks: this is part of the programme.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- Start these exercises only when Dr Malik has said that your finger can move freely.
- Some discomfort during the exercises is normal, and does not mean you are harming the finger. Do a little less next time if the pain is much worse than usual during an exercise, has not settled within about 2 hours, or the finger is more painful or swollen the next morning; then build up again gradually.
- Never force a joint.
- Follow these exercises as they are written unless Dr Malik tells you otherwise.
- This sheet does not replace individual advice. If it differs from what you were told in clinic, follow the advice you were given there.

Part 1: Getting the movement back

Three times a day. Warm your hand first if it is stiff, and hold each position for 5 seconds.

01 Tendon glides: the fist series

Getting the tendons that bend your fingers to glide freely again.

1. Rest your elbow on a table, with your forearm upright. Start with your fingers straight, pointing up.
2. Bend the top two joints of your fingers, keeping the knuckles straight, so that your hand makes a hook.
3. Close your hand into a full fist.
4. Open the fist, and bend your fingers only at the knuckles, keeping them straight, like a tabletop.
5. Bend your fingers at the knuckles and the middle joints, so that your fingertips touch the base of your palm, keeping the top joints straight. Then straighten your fingers and start again.

EACH POSITION	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
5 seconds	5 times through	3 times a day

02 Bending the middle joint on its own

Getting the middle joint of the finger to bend fully.

1. Rest the back of your hand on a table, palm up.
2. With your other hand, hold the injured finger just below its middle joint, so that the knuckle stays straight.
3. Bend the middle joint as far as you can. Hold, then straighten it fully.

HOLD	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
5 seconds	10	3 times a day

03 Bending the end joint on its own

Getting the end joint of the finger to bend fully.

1. Rest the back of your hand on a table, palm up.
2. With your other hand, hold the injured finger just below its end joint, so that the middle joint stays straight.
3. Bend the end joint as far as you can. Hold, then straighten it fully.

HOLD	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
5 seconds	10	3 times a day

04 Lifting the fingers off the table

Getting the finger to straighten fully, and strengthening the muscles that straighten it.

1. Place your hand flat on a table, palm down, with your fingers straight.
2. Lift the injured finger off the table as high as you can, keeping it straight. Hold, then lower it.
3. Do the same with each of the other fingers, then lift all the fingers together.

HOLD	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
5 seconds	10	3 times a day

05 Spreading and closing the fingers

Moving the fingers apart and together, using the small muscles of the hand.

1. Place your hand flat on a table, palm down.
2. Spread your fingers and thumb as wide apart as you can. Hold.
3. Bring them back together, pressing them against each other. Hold.

HOLD	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
5 seconds	10	3 times a day

06 Thumb to each fingertip

Moving the thumb and fingers together, for gripping and picking things up.

1. Touch the tip of your thumb to the tip of your index finger, making an O shape. Hold.
2. Do the same with the tip of each of the other fingers in turn, ending with the little finger.
3. Open your hand wide, and start again.

HOLD	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
5 seconds	5 times through	3 times a day

Part 2: Gentle stretches

Three times a day, straight after Part 1, and especially for a finger that is stiff. Stretch gently: you should feel a stretch, not sharp pain.

07 Gently bending the finger

Helping the finger to bend further, especially if it is stiff.

1. Rest your forearm on a table and relax your hand.
2. With your other hand, gently bend each joint of the injured finger, as far as is comfortable, until you feel a stretch. Hold.
3. Relax, then repeat. Do this for each joint, especially any joint that is stiff.

HOLD	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
20 to 30 seconds	3	3 times a day

08 Gently straightening the finger

Helping the finger to straighten further, especially if it is stiff.

1. Place your hand flat on a table, palm down.
2. With your other hand, press gently on the injured finger, to straighten it as flat as it will go, until you feel a stretch. Hold.
3. Relax, then repeat.

HOLD	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
20 to 30 seconds	3	3 times a day

Part 3: Getting the strength back

Once a day, only when Dr Malik or your therapist says that you can start. You need a stress ball (a soft ball for squeezing) and a rubber band. Start gently, with fewer repetitions; when an exercise feels easy, do more repetitions or use a firmer ball.

09 Squeezing into a fist

Strengthening your grip.

1. Hold the stress ball in the palm of your injured hand.
2. Squeeze it into a full fist, as firmly as is comfortable. Hold.
3. Relax your hand, and repeat.

HOLD	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
5 seconds	10	Once a day

10 Pinching

Strengthening the pinch between the thumb and each finger, for picking things up.

1. Hold the stress ball between the tip of your thumb and the tip of your index finger.
2. Pinch it as firmly as is comfortable. Hold, then relax.
3. Do the same between the thumb and each of the other fingers in turn.

HOLD	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
5 seconds	5 with each finger	Once a day

11 Spreading against resistance

Strengthening the muscles that open the hand and spread the fingers.

1. Bring your fingers and thumb together, and place a rubber band around them, near the tips.
2. Spread your fingers and thumb apart against it, as far as you can. Hold.
3. Relax, and repeat.

HOLD	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
5 seconds	10	Once a day

12 Squeezing between the fingers

Strengthening the small muscles that bring the fingers together.

1. Place a pen or a pencil between two fingers, near the knuckles.
2. Squeeze the fingers together, as firmly as is comfortable. Hold, then relax.
3. Do the same between each pair of fingers.

HOLD	REPETITIONS	HOW OFTEN
5 seconds	5 for each pair	Once a day

Using your hand

Use your hand for light everyday tasks from the start, such as eating, dressing, washing, writing and using your phone. Everyday use is one of the best exercises.

Avoid heavy gripping, lifting and carrying with the injured hand, and anything that could knock or bend the finger, until Dr Malik says it is safe. Then build them up gradually.

Sport and work

Sport: you can usually keep fit with activities that do not load the hand, such as walking and running. Sports that load the hand or risk knocking the finger, such as cricket, volleyball, basketball, contact sports and the gym, are built up gradually, sometimes with the finger strapped to its neighbour for

protection, and planned separately for each person, depending on the sport and what it demands of your hand.

Work: light work, such as office work, is usually possible early, using the hand as comfort allows. Heavy work, such as lifting, gripping tools or carrying loads, is built up gradually, and planned separately for each person, depending on your work and what it demands of your hand.

What to expect

Most people find the movement improves over the first few weeks of regular exercise, and keeps improving for several months. Strength usually takes longer to come back than movement.

Swelling around a finger joint can take many months to go completely, and the joint may stay a little thicker than before. Some people are left with some stiffness, especially in the middle joint.

The finger may be more sensitive to cold for a long time after the injury: keep your hands warm in cold weather, for example with gloves.

If the finger stays stiff

If your finger is not improving with these exercises, Dr Malik may suggest sessions with a hand therapist, or a splint that gently stretches the joint over time, for example at night.

Rarely, when a finger stays very stiff despite many months of therapy, an operation to free the joint or the tendons may be discussed.

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