

Extensor Tendon Injury

“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”

Marybeth Ezaki, MD, President, American Society for Surgery of the Hand

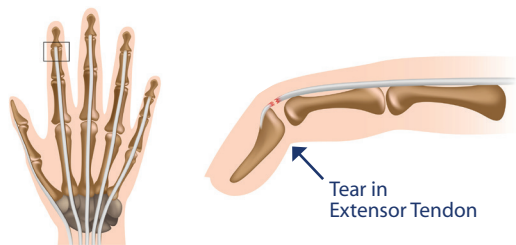
What are the extensor tendons and what do they do?

The extensor tendons are located on the back side of the hand, and are visible especially when the fingers are clawed. These tendons attach to muscles in the forearm and allow a person to straighten the fingers and thumb. Extensor tendons also allow us to make the peace sign, to perform the hitchhiking maneuver and, more importantly, to open the fingers in order to release an object in the hand.



How do extensor tendons become injured?

The extensor tendons can be injured by a cut from a sharp object or when a finger is “jammed” while playing sports. Other ways in which the extensor tendons become injured include fractures, crush injuries and trauma. Conditions such as arthritis can also cause extensor tendon problems.



Example of “Baseball” or “Mallet Finger” extensor tendon injury at tip of finger

What are the possible treatments for an extensor tendon injury?

If an extensor tendon injury is suspected, it is important to visit a physician as soon as possible. An untreated injury can lead to the inability to straighten the fingers or thumb, and loss of motion in the hand. The location and extent of the injury will determine the necessary treatment. Some extensor tendon injuries can be treated solely with the use of an orthosis to immobilize healing tendons while other injuries will require surgery. Your physician will evaluate whether you need to be referred to a qualified hand surgeon or to a certified hand therapist for treatment.

What does a hand therapist do for extensor tendon injuries?

A hand therapist provides specialized care including non-operative and post-surgical treatment for extensor tendon injuries. A specialized hand therapy program may include a custom-made orthosis, and therapeutic exercises to restore motion and function of the hand. The physician, hand therapist and patient work together as a team in order to achieve the best possible outcomes after an extensor tendon injury.



Example of orthosis for “Mallet Finger”