

Finger Fracture & Dislocation

What You Need to Know

What Is a Finger Fracture or Dislocation?

Finger fractures and dislocations are among the most common injuries seen in urgent care and emergency settings, accounting for a large proportion of hand injuries in both athletes and non-athletes. A fracture is a break in one of the finger's three bones (phalanges), while a dislocation is when a finger joint is forced out of its normal alignment. Both can occur together. While these injuries may seem minor, improper treatment or inadequate rehabilitation can result in permanent stiffness, deformity, or loss of finger function.

What Does It Feel Like?

- Immediate pain, swelling, and bruising at the finger joint or shaft
- Visible deformity — the finger may appear crooked, angulated, or displaced
- Loss of ability to bend or straighten the finger
- Tenderness directly over the injury site
- Dislocations: the joint appears offset — the most common dislocation is at the PIP joint (middle knuckle), often called "jammed finger"

What Is the Treatment?

Non-surgical (most common):

- Buddy taping — taping the injured finger to its neighbor for support and controlled motion
- Splinting — for displaced fractures or unstable dislocations; typically 3–4 weeks
- Mallet finger (fingertip droop from extensor tendon avulsion): continuous extension splinting for 6–8 weeks — very strict

Surgical:

- Complex, displaced, intra-articular (into the joint), or unstable fractures may require pins, screws, or plates

Physical Therapy:

- Begins as soon as the fracture is stable — early movement is critical for finger outcomes

- Tendon gliding exercises, blocking exercises, and range-of-motion protocols
- Edema control and scar management after surgical cases
- Strengthening as healing allows

When Should I Be Concerned?

- "Just a jammed finger" that cannot be straightened — may be a mallet finger requiring specific treatment
- Ongoing instability in the joint after initial treatment
- Significant stiffness not improving with PT
- Signs of infection after surgical fixation

The Good News

The vast majority of finger fractures and dislocations heal with excellent outcomes when treated promptly and appropriately. Starting PT early is the single most important factor in preventing the stiffness and weakness that can permanently limit finger function. Fingers are remarkable in their ability to recover — but they need guidance.

Starting PT early after a finger fracture or dislocation is the key to preventing permanent stiffness and restoring full function.

This information is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for a professional evaluation. Call us today — we have immediate openings with no waitlist.

Call (781) 769-2040 • Book online at www.ptandsr.com