

DIGITAL AMPUTATION



WHAT IS...

Digital Amputation?

Digital amputation is, simply put, the amputation (or surgical removal) of the tip, end, joint, or any portion of the finger. The amputation is performed following trauma to the finger, or by elective surgery for a condition that has affected the health of the finger.

What Causes Digital Amputation to Be Necessary?

Finger amputation is usually a result of a severe injury to the finger. A portion or the entire finger may have to be amputated if it cannot be repaired following trauma. Infrequently, fingertip amputation is necessary from other causes including tumors, infection, decreased blood supply, or thermal injuries such as burns or frostbite.

How Can Digital Amputation Affect You?

Generally, the affect on the use of your hand depends on how many fingers are involved as well as to what level the finger is amputated. Multiple finger injury may cause a decrease in your ability to lift, carry, or manipulate objects. With single finger involvement, the other fingers can assist as needed, but some strength and dexterity may be lost. The amputation of a finger or fingers can be a difficult adjustment and you may require support from a mental health professional or counselor. Occasionally, job re-training

continued on back

may be necessary, and your hand therapist can assist you in that process.

What Can Happen if You Don't Seek Treatment?

Ideally, the finger will heal best if the opening is cleaned and closed in surgery. If left alone, it may take a long time for the wound to close and the finger tip may be overly tender and intolerant to pressure.

What Are Some Possible Treatments for Digital Amputation?

Generally, the finger will be examined, cleaned, and closed if possible. Occasionally, a skin graft will be needed to help cover the end of the finger or your doctor may need to shorten the finger slightly to help cover the end.

What Does Your Hand Therapist Do to Help You with a Digital Amputation?

Your hand therapist will assist you in helping to clean and bandage the incision or wound. As the wound heals, your therapist will train you in techniques to decrease swelling and increase range of motion. He or she will also educate you in decreasing the sensitivity of the tip of the finger(s) and will add activities to your program that will increase the affected finger(s) use for grasping or lifting.

It is critical to move all joints that were not injured so the fingers and hand do not get stiff. Moving each joint on your own power and/or using your other hand will

Disclaimer: These education topics should not be construed as including all proper methods of care or excluding other acceptable methods of care reasonably directed to obtaining the same results. The final judgment regarding any specific procedure or treatment must be made by the hand therapist in light of all circumstances presented by the patient and the resources available.

© Copyright 2002 by the American Society of Hand Therapists. All rights reserved



maintain their use. After the incision or wound has healed, your hand therapist may add strengthening to your program using rehabilitation tools such as putty and weights. Usually, your therapist will also work with you on a program to help decrease the sensitivity of the end of the finger(s). Occasionally, the nerve at the end of the finger will continue to be very sensitive, limiting the use of the finger. This may require further surgery to correct the problem. After the finger(s) has completely healed, you may obtain a prosthesis. Your hand therapist and surgeon can guide you in obtaining the appropriate prosthetic device.