

PHALANGEAL FRACTURES



WHAT ARE...

Phalangeal Fractures?

Phalangeal (pronounced fuh-LAN-gel) fractures, also known as digital fractures, are most commonly referred to as fractures of the fingers. Finger fractures are cracked or broken bones that can happen in the phalanges, or finger bones, of the hand. There are three phalanges in each finger and two in the thumb.

What Causes Phalangeal Fractures?

Phalangeal fractures are usually caused by a fall, crush to the hand, or getting fingers jammed or caught and twisted. Sports injuries, car accidents, and falls on the ground commonly lead to fractures of the fingers, or phalanges.

How Can Phalangeal Fractures Affect You?

Fractures to the fingers can be quite devastating if not treated properly. If angulation or rotation occurs, the fingers will not line up when trying to make a fist. Without a full-functioning fist, you will not have full strength. Additionally, you will be limited in grasping anything with a round handle or a handle with a small diameter. Fractures of the ring and small finger are especially problematic with regard to grasping large objects.

What Can Happen if You Don't Seek Treatment for Phalangeal Fractures?

Finger fractures may lead to a number of hand problems if not treated, including loss of function, stiffness, pain, loss of

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strength, and poor coordination. A finger fracture can make it difficult to move all the digits and the thumb normally. If the bone heals on its own, it may be in the wrong position and then will not bend or straighten properly. The fracture could also hurt the tendons or ligaments that are close to the fracture. If the break involves the joint, or breaks through the skin, immediate care by a physician is suggested so that the finger does not get infected and the fracture does not worsen.

What Are Some Options for Correction of Phalangeal Fractures?

Usually, confirmation of a fracture via x-ray is needed to define and locate the problem. Treatment depends on the type of fracture and where it is located in the hand. Depending on the severity of the fracture, surgery may be required to put the pieces of the bone back together using hardware such as pins, screws, or wires. Your hand therapist will supervise your post-surgical or non-surgical rehabilitation, through casting, splinting, or buddy taping two fingers together, or through various rehabilitation tools, exercises, and techniques.

What Does Your Hand Therapist Do to Help Correct this Condition?

Your physician will usually send you to see a hand therapist as early as 1-3 days after injury or surgery. Your hand therapist brings his or her advanced specialty of upper extremity injury care to the fractured finger. Your hand therapist can design and carryout an individualized

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.

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treatment program. Your hand therapist can quickly evaluate problems and progress and make appropriate changes to the program, which may include specialty splints, individualized exercise programs, and training in special equipment.

Your therapist may make a splint or provide buddy straps to help rest the healing fracture. The splint or buddy straps are generally worn for 3-6 weeks and exercises begin as soon as the doctor feels the fracture is sufficiently stable. Your hand therapist will start working with you on gentle exercises to bend and straighten your fingers and get them to touch your thumb. As you progress, you will work on the normal motions required to manipulate small objects like buttons, fasteners, and coins. Strengthening usually starts at 4-6 weeks. The frequency and length of treatment varies widely with the severity of the injury and depends on the presence or lack of any complications. Participation in non-competitive sports is usually possible after 8-12 weeks. If your job requires lifting, pushing, or pulling, you may be able to return to work, with modifications from your hand therapist, within a couple of weeks. If your job requires heavy work or power tools your doctor and hand therapist will discuss when they anticipate you can safely return to work. Regaining full function depends on many factors outside of your control, but most important is your participation in hand therapy.

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