

Trigger thumb

What is trigger thumb?

Trigger thumb is a fairly common condition affecting about 3 in 1000 babies, where the thumb has a tendency to become stuck in the flexed (bent) position. There may be a palpable lump in the tendon at the base of the thumb. There are different degrees of severity and in the most severe cases the thumb will be fixed in the bent position. The condition may be bilateral (affect both sides).

Why has my child got trigger thumb?

In some cases of trigger thumb, there is a family tendency for the condition; in others it is a random occurrence. It is thought that a thickening of the tendon (Notta's node) causes it to become stuck beneath one of the tight pulleys at the base of the thumb.

Is there anything else wrong with my child?

Trigger thumb is not usually associated with other abnormalities in your child.

Does it hurt?

No, this is not a painful condition, even if the thumb is stuck in the bent position.

Will my child be able to use their hand normally?

Children are very good at adapting to what is normal for them and will likely use their hand totally normally. If surgery is recommended, afterwards they will continue to use their hand as before and the thumb will be fully flexible.

How is it treated?

In many cases, no treatment is required as the condition resolves spontaneously. If surgical treatment is recommended for your child, the operation involves a small cut at the base of the thumb, where the tendon is trapped. The pulley is released, freeing the tendon. The surgeon will check that the thumb moves normally before stitching up the small cut with dissolving sutures and placing the hand in a bandage. The operation is a day case procedure (you will go home the same day), performed under a light general anaesthetic (your child will be asleep).

Why might surgery be delayed after birth?

There is no rush to treat trigger thumb because many cases resolve spontaneously. If your child still has trigger thumb at the age of four or if their thumb is fixed in the flexed position, it is more likely that surgery will be recommended.

How should I explain this condition to family and friends?

You can give them a copy of this leaflet and tell them that trigger thumb is a common congenital hand condition, which is dealt with early in life. Here in Cornwall we have a team of 3 specialist hand surgeons who have had training to treat this condition.

Any questions?

Please contact one of the hand surgeons via the secretary on 01872 253438.

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690