

Flexor Tendon Lacerations



When a Flexor Tendon Is Cut

Tendons are cordlike fibers that connect muscle to bone. The flexor tendons attach muscles in the forearm to bones on the palm side of the fingers. These tendons allow you to bend your fingers. If a flexor tendon is cut all the way through (lacerated), the finger can no longer bend on its own. If nearby nerves are also injured, the finger may be numb.



Causes

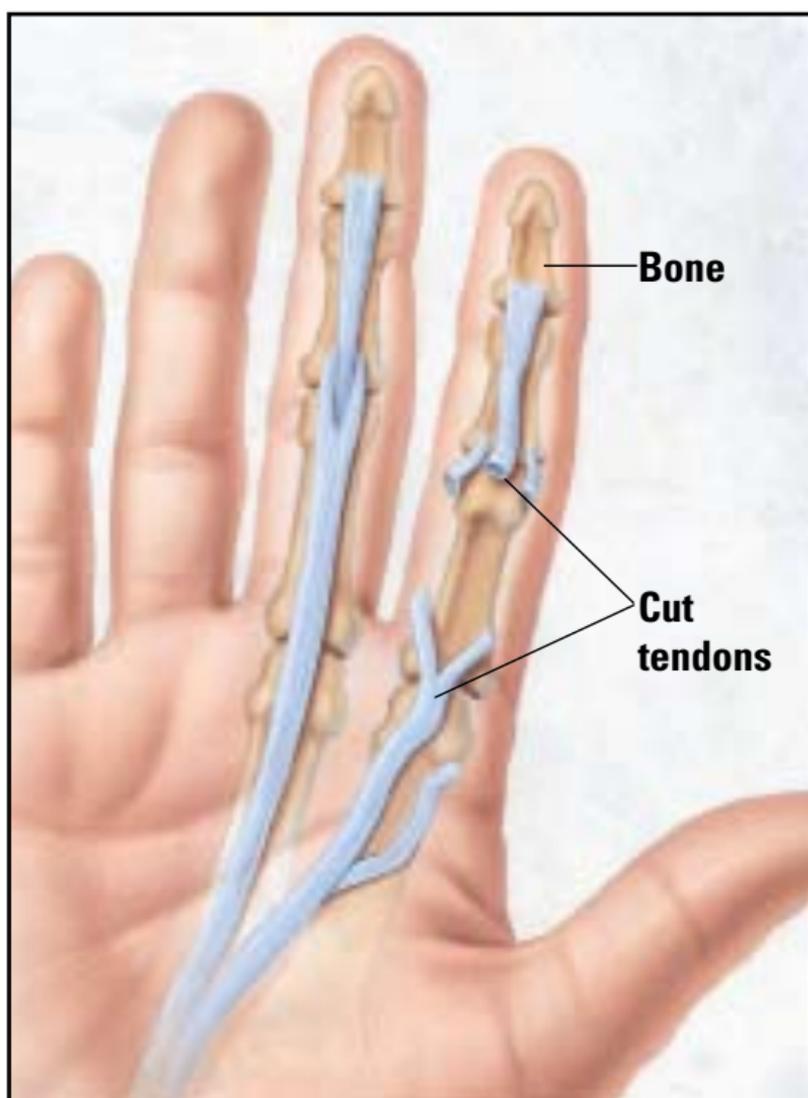
A flexor tendon injury is most often caused by a deep cut on the palm side of the wrist, hand, or fingers. A deep knife wound or a gash from broken glass or another sharp object can cut a flexor tendon. A deep cut can also occur while using machinery or power tools. Sometimes a flexor tendon can snap when a finger is yanked or jerked, such as during a football game.

Inside Your Hand

Your hand is made up of bones, joints, and “soft tissue” such as nerves, muscles, and tendons. Each finger has three joints and two flexor tendons, which allow the finger to bend. One flexor tendon attaches to the middle bone of the finger. The other attaches to the bone at the tip of the finger.

When a Flexor Tendon Is Cut

Tendons are naturally taut. When a flexor tendon is cut, the two ends pull away from each other — much like the two ends of a rubber band when it breaks. If your finger is bent when the tendon is cut, the ends pull even farther away when you straighten the finger. With the tendon cut, the muscles are no longer attached to the bones, and you can't bend your finger.



Treating Flexor Tendon Lacerations

Your doctor can tell if your flexor tendon is cut by examining your finger. If the wound is very deep, the finger may be x-rayed to make sure the bone isn't damaged, too. If the flexor tendon is cut all the way through, your doctor will do surgery to rejoin the two ends of the tendon and repair any other damaged tissue. After surgery, you'll need to follow a specific exercise program to regain movement in the finger.

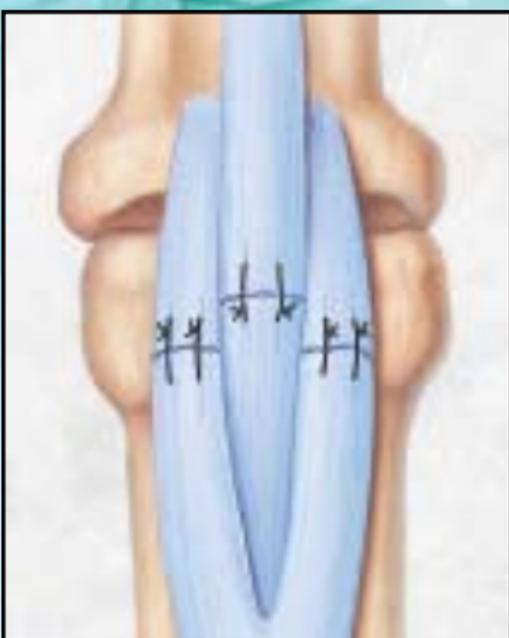


Your Surgery

Your surgeon first exposes the cut tendon with a zigzag-shaped incision. Then he or she finds the two separated ends and stitches them back together. In some cases, your surgeon may need to graft a new tendon to replace the cut one. Nerves and other soft tissue may also need to be repaired. Surgery generally takes 2–3 hours. Your entire body may be anesthetized, or only the hand and arm may be numbed. In either case, you feel no pain during surgery. Usually you can go home the same day.

Starting Your Recovery

Your hand may be in a splint or cast for several weeks after surgery. This protects the tendon as it heals. You will probably start a gentle exercise program soon after surgery. Exercising your finger as directed by your doctor or therapist is very important. Surgery creates scar tissue inside the finger. Without regular exercise, this tissue will stick to the tendon and the bone. Then you won't be able to bend your finger easily. As the tendon heals, you'll slowly begin to strengthen the tendon and muscles, and move your finger more. Recovery usually takes 6–12 weeks.



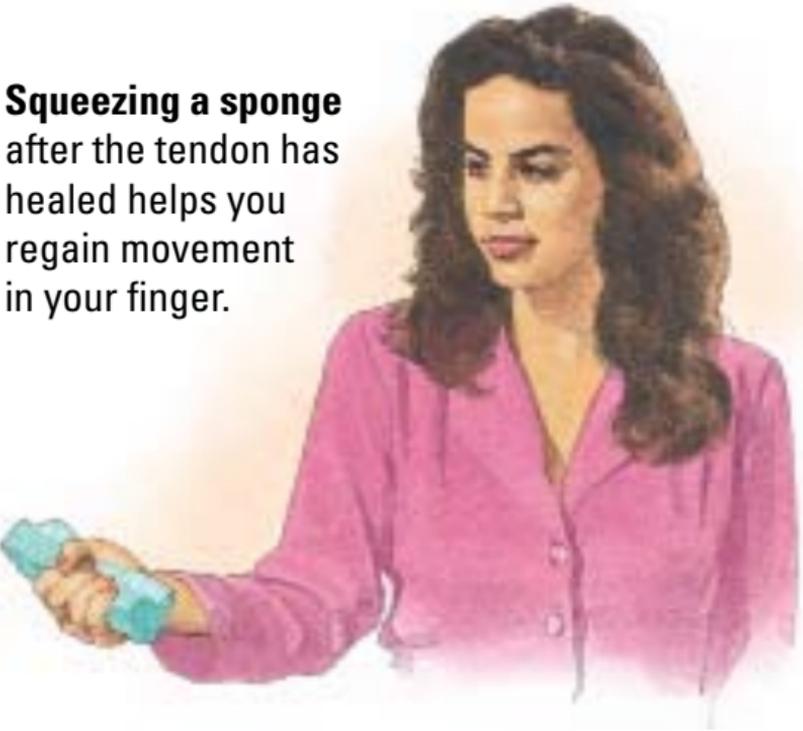
To rejoin the cut tendon, your doctor stitches the two ends back together. Sometimes nearby tissue also needs to be repaired.



Your Role in Healing

You play a major role in helping your finger to bend again after surgery. You will need to do special exercises several times a day for 4–6 months. Your doctor will oversee your exercise program or refer you to a trained therapist. Be sure to do *only* the exercises recommended by your doctor or therapist. Following this program is the key to regaining use of your finger.

Squeezing a sponge after the tendon has healed helps you regain movement in your finger.



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