



# How to Treat a Broken Finger

Expert  
Reviewed

Four Parts: [Determining the Severity of the Injury](#) [Treating the Finger on the Way to the Doctor](#) [Getting Medical Treatment](#) [Taking Care of the injury](#)

A broken finger occurs when you fracture one of the bones in any of your fingers. Your thumbs have two bones and your other digits have three bones. Broken fingers are common injuries, due to a fall while playing sports, fingers getting caught in car doors, bending your finger in an awkward position, or other accidents. To treat your finger properly, you should first determine how severe your injury is. You can then apply home treatment before you head to the nearest hospital.<sup>[1]</sup>

Part  
1

## Determining the Severity of the Injury

**1 Check your finger for any bruising or swelling.** Bruising and swelling will likely occur because you have broken tiny blood vessels in your finger. If you have fractured the fingertip, there will likely be purple blood visible underneath your nail and bruising on the pad of your finger.<sup>[2]</sup>

- You may also feel a sharp pain when you touch the finger. This is a symptom of a broken finger. Some people can still move their finger though it might be broken and may experience numbness or a dull pain. But these could still be signs of a fractured or broken finger and require immediate medical attention <sup>[3]</sup>
- Check for sensation loss or loss of capillary refill. Capillary refill is the return of blood to the finger after pressure has been applied.

**2 Examine your finger for any exposed cuts or bones.** You may see large open wounds or pieces of bone that have broken your skin and are sticking out of your skin. These are signs of a severe fracture, known as a compound fracture. If you have these symptoms, you should seek immediate medical attention.<sup>[4]</sup>

- As well, if there a lot of blood coming from an open wound on your finger, you should see a doctor.<sup>[5]</sup>

**3 Check if your finger looks deformed.** If part of your finger is pointing in a different direction, the bone is probably broken or dislocated. A dislocated finger occurs when the bone has moved out of position and usually looks deformed at a joint, such as your knuckle.<sup>[6]</sup> You should see a doctor if you have a dislocated finger.

- There are three bones in each of your fingers and they are all arranged in the same manner. The first bone is the proximal phalanx, the second bone is the middle phalanx, and the bone farthest from your hand is the distal phalanx. Because your thumb is the shortest finger, it does not have a middle phalanx. Your knuckles are joints formed by the bones of your fingers. Often, you break your finger at the knuckles, or the joints.<sup>[7]</sup>
- Breaks at the base of your finger (the distal phalanx) are usually easier to treat than fractures at your joints or knuckles.<sup>[8]</sup>

**4 Note if the pain and swelling goes down after a couple of hours.** If your finger is not deformed or bruised, and the pain and swelling eventually subside, you may have just sprained your finger. A sprain means you have stretched the ligaments, which are the bands of tissue that hold the bones in your finger together at the joint.<sup>[9]</sup>

- If you think you have a sprained finger, avoid using the finger. Check to see if the pain and swelling gets better over the next day or two. If the pain and swelling does not go away, you should get medical treatment to confirm the finger is only sprained and not fractured or broken. A physical and x-rays will determine this.

Part  
2

## Treating the Finger on the Way to the Doctor

**1 Apply ice to the finger.** Wrap the ice in a towel and apply it to the finger on your way to the emergency room. This will reduce swelling and bruising. Never apply ice directly to your skin.<sup>[10]</sup>

- Keep your finger elevated as you ice it, above your heart. This will allow gravity to help reduce the swelling and bleeding.

**2 Make a splint.** A splint will keep your finger elevated and hold it in place. To make a splint:

- Take a long thin item, as long as your broken finger, such as a popsicle stick or a pen.
- Place it next to your broken finger, or have a friend or family member help you hold it in place.
- Use medical tape to wrap together the stick or pen and your finger. Wrap it loosely. The tape should not squeeze or pinch your finger. If your finger is wrapped too tightly, this can cause additional swelling and cut off circulation to your injured digit.<sup>[11]</sup>

**3 Try to remove any rings or jewelry.** If possible, try to slide off any rings on your finger before the finger swells. It will be much harder to remove the rings once your finger swells up and starts to feel painful.<sup>[12]</sup>

### Part 3 Getting Medical Treatment

**1 Receive a physical from your doctor.** Your doctor will ask for your medical history and perform a physical on you to get more information about you and to see how the injury occurred. Your doctor will check for deformity, neovascular integrity, malrotation of the finger, and skin lacerations or injury.

**2 Let your doctor do an X-ray of your finger.** This will allow the doctor to confirm whether there is a fracture of the bone in your finger. There are two types of fractures: simple and complex. The type of fracture you have will determine your treatment.<sup>[13]</sup>

- Simple fractures are breaks or cracks in the bone that do not break through the skin.<sup>[14]</sup>
- Complex fractures are breaks in which the bone sticks through the skin.<sup>[15]</sup>

**3 Allow your doctor to splint your finger if you have a simple fracture.** A simple fracture is when the finger is stable and there are no open wounds or cuts on the skin of the broken finger. The symptoms will likely not get worse or cause complications with your ability to move your finger once it is healed.<sup>[16]</sup>

- In some cases, your doctor may strap your broken finger to the finger next to it, known as buddy taping. The splint will hold your finger in position as it heals.<sup>[17]</sup>
- Your doctor may also move the bone back into place, a procedure known as reduction. You will be given a local anaesthetic to numb the area. Your doctor will then realign the bone.

**4 Talk to your doctor about pain medication.** You can take over-the-counter pain medication to reduce swelling and pain, but you should still check with your doctor about which medicines are right for you and how much you can take each day.<sup>[18]</sup>

- Your doctor can also give you a prescription for pain medication to decrease the pain, depending on the severity of your injury.
- If you have an open wound on the finger, you may need antibiotics or a tetanus shot. This medicine will prevent any infection caused by bacteria entering the wound.

**5 Consider surgery if the injury is complex or severe.** If the fracture is severe, you may need surgery to stabilize the broken bone.

- Your doctor may recommend open reduction surgery. The surgeon will make a small cut on your finger so she can see the fracture and move the bone. In some cases, the surgeon may use small wires or plates and screws to keep the bone in place and allow it to heal properly.<sup>[19]</sup>
- These pins will later be removed once your finger has healed.

**6 Get a referral for an orthopedic surgeon or hand surgeon.** If you have a compound fracture, bad break, nerve

injury, or vascular compromise, your doctor may refer you to an orthopedic surgeon (bone and joint specialist) or a hand surgeon.<sup>[20]</sup>

- These specialists will then examine your injury and determine if your injury requires surgery.

Part  
4

## Taking Care of the injury

**1 Keep the splint clean, dry, and elevated.** This will prevent any infection, especially if you have open wounds or cuts on your finger. Keeping your finger elevated will also help to keep your finger in position and let it heal properly.<sup>[21]</sup>

**2 Do not use your finger or hand until your follow-up appointment.** Use your non-injured hand for daily things like eating, bathing, and picking up objects. It's important you give your finger time to heal without any movement or disturbance of the splint.<sup>[22]</sup>

- Your follow-up appointment with a doctor or hand specialist should be one week after your initial treatment. At the follow-up appointment, the physician will check that the bone fragments are still aligned and healing properly.<sup>[23]</sup>
- For most fractures, your finger will take up to six weeks of rest before you can return to sporting activity or work.

**3 Start moving your finger once it is out of the splint.** As soon as your doctor confirms your finger has healed and it is out of the splint, it's important to move it around. If you keep it splinted for too long, or immobile after it is out of the splint, the joint will stiffen and your finger will become harder to move and use.<sup>[24]</sup>

**4 See a physiotherapist if your injury is severe.** The physiotherapist can give you advice on how to regain normal movement in your finger. She may also give you gentle hand exercises you can do to keep your finger moving and to ensure it regains its mobility.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Community Q&A

### Is my finger broken if it's throbbing?

wikiHow  
Contributor

Not necessarily. If, however, the finger is also purple, swollen, and/or super hard to move, it's time to bite the bullet and go to the ER.

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### Is it normal for a finger to still be swollen five weeks after it was broken?

wikiHow  
Contributor

Yes. In most cases, it will take about six weeks before the broken finger returns to normal. If it takes any longer, you might want to visit a doctor.

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### Can I treat my broken finger by taping it to an adjacent finger and avoid a doctor visit?

wikiHow  
Contributor

The problem with doing this is that the manner in which the bones mend may not be ideal, even if you're able to withstand the pain. This is definitely a time to find the fee for the doctor's visit, or to go to the emergency room, and get some proper help in ensuring that your broken finger mends properly. You have to live with the results for the rest of your life, so be sure it's done well.

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### What will an orthopedic doctor do for a chipped bone and fracture on a finger?

wikiHow  
Contributor

They will probably put it in a cast/splint or tape. But if it is more severe, they may have to realign your bone or even consider surgery.

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### What should I do to help treat a sprained finger?

wikiHow  
Contributor

Use a stick or something secure, like a craft stick. Tape it onto the finger that is sprained with special tape they use for sprains. Then it will hold it up straight so you won't accidentally bend it or anything. Or, just go to the hospital.

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**If I fractured a finger and it is still discolored after two days, do I need to see a doctor?**wikiHow  
Contributor

It is better to have the finger examined immediately rather than wait. If the bone is fractured, then waiting only makes it more difficult.

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**I broke my little finger in three places. I had surgery and then a hard cast for two months, and now a splint. I can take it off to do therapy, but it is still swollen and hard to completely bend, and won't straighten. What can I do to help my process to straighten it?**wikiHow  
Contributor

Just follow through with the physical therapy exercises you have been ordered. It can take a long time to heal, especially if you broke it in three places, so be patient. The next time you have therapy, ask your therapist if you can increase the exercises in order to expedite the healing process.

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**I've had a swollen finger that won't bend for over a month. What should I do?**wikiHow  
Contributor

Go to your doctor to get it checked out -- it's possible you fractured or broke it.

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**How do I treat an infected toe**wikiHow  
Contributor

There are specific questions that need to be answered first. Is your toe bruised, throbbing, oozing pus, or exhibiting symptoms of a fungal infection? Then visit a doctor to have it looked at. This article may also be of some assistance: [how to cure an infected toe](#).

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**Can I wait until the next day after an injury to go the emergency room?**wikiHow  
Contributor

It depends on the injury, but you should really go as soon as possible.

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Can you tell what kind of crop you'll have by the amount of tassels your tree produces?

Your answer...

Reply

On **How to Delete Yahoo Email**, a reader asks:

Why does my Yahoo trash show 400 emails when there is nothing in the trash?

Your answer...

Reply

On **How to Apply Rolled Roofing**, a reader asks:

How do I do the seams if the roll doesn't go all the way?

Your answer...

Reply

**Sources and Citations**

1. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2684218/>

2. <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/broken-finger/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

3. [http://www.medicinenet.com/broken\\_finger/page3.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/broken_finger/page3.htm)

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