

Idaho Falls Pediatrics

Finger Fracture

What is a finger fracture?

A fracture is a break in a bone. The break may be small or large, may be straight or crooked, and may go into the joint (the place where 2 finger bones meet).

A child's bones are different than adults in some important ways. First, the bones of a child are more flexible. Sometimes the bones crack like green branches from a live tree instead of snapping like a dry stick. Other times the bones just buckle slightly. When this happens, the bone is broken but there isn't a clear fracture line just a slightly raised area on the outside of the bone. The second major difference is that a child's bones are still growing. Bones grow from an area near their ends called the growth plate. Sometimes fractures occur within the growth plate and can be difficult to see on an x-ray. Fractures in this area can affect the growth of the bone and may require special x-rays or other tests.

How does it occur?

A finger fracture usually occurs from your child hitting a hard object with the finger, being hit by a ball, getting slammed in a door, or falling onto the hand.

What are the symptoms?

Your child will have pain, swelling, and tenderness on the finger that is injured. The finger may be hard to move and it may look crooked.

How is it diagnosed?

Your child's health care provider will review the symptoms, ask about how the injury occurred, and examine the finger. An x-ray of the finger will be taken. The x-ray will show if there is a break.

How is it treated?

If the broken bone is crooked your child's provider will straighten it. Then a splint will be placed on your child's finger. Depending on the type of fracture the splint may be placed on the bottom surface of your child's finger or the top surface. Your child's provider will decide if the finger should be kept straight or slightly bent. Your child will need to wear this splint for 3 to 6 weeks, depending on the injury. Some finger fractures don't need to be splinted, they only need to be taped to the finger next to it (called "buddy taping").

Fractures that are large, crooked, or go into the joint may need surgery.

Treatment may also include:

- Elevating your child's finger by placing the hand on a pillow when sleeping or the back of a couch when sitting down.
- Putting an ice bag on the injured finger for 20 to 30 minutes every 3 to 4 hours for the first 2 to 3 days.
- Taking anti-inflammatory medicine or other medicine prescribed by your child's provider.

Your child will need to start doing finger exercises when the fracture has healed. A follow-up x-ray may be needed to see if the finger has healed.

What are the complications?

Even small fractures may cause swelling in the joints where the injury is. Sometimes this swelling may take weeks or months to go away, and in some cases may be permanent. Some fingers are crooked when the fracture heals. Fractures that go into the growth plate may affect future growth, sometimes resulting in a crooked finger.

How long will the effects last?

It usually takes 4 to 6 weeks for a broken finger to heal. Most simple finger fractures heal without any problems. If the fracture goes into a joint your child's finger may continue to feel stiff and can lose some range of motion.

When can my child return to normal activities?

Everyone recovers from an injury at a different rate. Return to your child's activities will be determined by how soon the finger recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since the injury has occurred. The goal of rehabilitation is to return to normal activities as soon as is safely possible. If your child returns too soon it may make the injury worse.

Your child may return to sports when the finger has full range of motion without pain and has the same strength as the uninjured fingers. Your child may be able to participate in some activities while wearing a splint or while the finger is buddy-taped.

*NOTE: This information is provided as a public educational service. The information does not replace any of the instructions your physician gives you. If you have a medical emergency please call 911 or call the Hospital at (208) 529-6111. If you have questions about your child's care, please call Idaho Falls Pediatrics at (208) 522-4600.