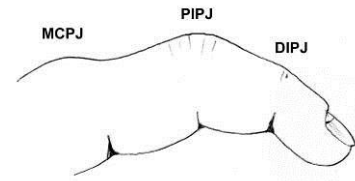


## EXERCISING THE INJURED FINGER

Even minor "sprains" or bruising of a finger causes swelling and difficulty in both bending and straightening it fully. A sore finger tends to be held slightly bent (diagram), which can result in permanent stiffness unless prevented by early exercise.

Scarring is part of the healing process. Its amount is influenced by the type and severity of injury as well as problems such as infection and persistent swelling. Scarring makes skin stiff and will prevent free glide of tendons and stretching of the joint lining (capsule and ligaments).



Movement is important to maintain glide and elasticity of tissues and to pump away the tissue fluid (oedema) that causes the swelling. The inter-phalangeal joints (PIPJ & DIPJ) have a particular tendency to stiffen because of their complex anatomy. Exercises need to be tailored to the precise injury and focused on the individual joints rather than the whole finger. If you have sustained a fracture or tendon injury, you will be taken through an individual and separate program of splinting and exercises, at least in the early stages.

For the simple sprained, bruised or lacerated finger, you need to perform "blocked" exercises. Whilst there is nothing wrong with "composite" exercises such as making a fist, these are made difficult by the swelling and are inadequate if the only exercise performed. The exercises may be supplemented by a splint and special taping (e.g. Coban Wrap).

The effect of swelling and skin tightness is minimised by focusing on a limited number of joints. Furthermore, bracing neighbouring joints pre-tensions tendons, allowing all your effort to be transferred effectively to the joint(s) selected. These diagrams show the exercises. Although these exercises are simple in concept, we have found that patients find them difficult to perform and most importantly remember!

**How?** The concept is first to brace the finger securely at the MCPJ and only then to perform the exercise, whilst maintaining the braced position. You straighten the MCPJ to bend the IPJ and bend the MCPJ to straighten the IPJ.

**How long?** Brief (1-2 minutes) but sustained exercises (e.g. bend or straighten; count 1,2,...10 then release; only two or three times).

**How often?** The exercises should be performed as often as practically possible, perhaps every hour but eased off if causing pain afterwards.

**How hard?** You should explore the "envelope" of discomfort. Push yourself a little but causing real pain often makes the finger more inflamed and the situation worse.

We try to avoid being too inflexible about the exercise programmes. Be intuitive and listen to your finger. If you think you have overdone it, you probably have!

