

TENOSYNOVITIS

The **flexor tendons** that bend the fingers run from the forearm. As the tendons cross joints, they run through pulleys. At the wrist, this creates the **carpal tunnel**. In the fingers, there is a complex system of pulleys called the **flexor sheath**.

The tendons are lined by a layer of tissue called the **tenosynovium**. This allows them to glide smoothly through the various pulleys.

As we age, the tenosynovium degenerates and thickens, a condition called **tenosynovitis**. It is likely that some people are genetically more prone to the problem than others. Some medical conditions, such as diabetes, can increase the incidence and severity of the problem. There is no evidence that tenosynovitis is caused by work. However, it is recognised that heavy and repetitive use of the hand can aggravate the condition.

Tenosynovitis causes a number of symptoms in the hand due to the condition itself as well as secondary mechanical effects. The symptoms tend to be worse in the morning.

Tenosynovitis Patients may note that the fingers feel “slow”. They may experience a creaking or clicking sensation as the fingers are moved. The fingers are often a little swollen. The palm and fingers may feel tender to pressure.

Carpal tunnel syndrome Swelling of the tenosynovium within the carpal tunnel can cause pressure on the median nerve. This produces tingling in the fingers.

Trigger finger Swelling of the tenosynovium can interfere with movement of the fingers. A lump develops on the tendons, that causes the tendon to “catch” as it straightens

There is no way of curing tenosynovitis. Specific problems such as carpal tunnel syndrome or trigger finger may be treated either by steroid injection or surgery. However, even after treatment, the underlying problem will persist. Patients have no alternative but to accept this and if necessary to modify hand usage.

