Fingertip and Nailbed Injuries

What gets injured with fingertip and nail bed injuries?
Fingertip and nail bed injuries are a very common hand injury. Injuries may include a fractured (broken) distal phalanx bone, and/or cuts of the nail bed, fingertip skin (pulp), the tendons that straighten or bend the fingertip, and nerve endings.

What causes fingertip or nail bed injuries?
One of the most common causes of fingertip and nail bed injuries is a crush or pinch injury. For example, getting the fingertip caught in a door or hitting it with a hammer. Injuries can also happen from getting cut with a knife or power tool – such as a table saw, lawn mower, or snow blower.

How are fingertip and nail bed injuries diagnosed?
It is important to know how the injury happened. Your provider will take a detailed health history including existing medical conditions, how you use your hands, and perform a physical evaluation. X-rays are often taken to check if the bone has been injured and check joint alignment.

What is the treatment for a fingertip or nail bed injury?
Treatment will depend on the severity of the injury and what structures are involved. With some injuries, surgery may be needed to repair nail, skin, or bone. Your hand specialist will determine the best form of treatment for your specific injury.

Hand Therapy – Treatment for fingertip and nail bed injuries often includes a referral to Hand Therapy. Treatment may include one or more of the following:
- Splinting – a custom splint may be made to help protect the injured fingertip as it heals.
- Wound and scar care – if you have a wound, your therapist will instruct you in caring for your finger as it heals. They will also instruct you in scar management or stump remodeling techniques as appropriate.
- Exercises – your therapist will develop and instruct you in an exercise program to help you regain range of motion and strength, minimize hypersensitivity, and regain functional use.

What can I expect following an injury to a fingertip or nail bed?
It is common to have fingertip sensitivity for many months following an injury. The injured finger is often sensitive to cold temperatures and hypersensitive to touching different textures. The feeling in the fingertip may be dull or tingly. There may be loss of sensation (numb) in the finger that may or may not recover.

There may be deformity of the nail or the fingertip depending on the severity of the injury. If the nail was injured it can take 3-6 months for it to grow from the cuticle to the tip of the finger. Ask your provider if you have further questions or concerns about your specific injury.
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Additional resource for information on fingertip injuries

- American Society for Surgery of the Hand – assh.org
- American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons – aaos.org or orthoinfo.org

The content provided here is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or another qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.