

# Your Guide to Trigger Finger Surgery

Brian J. Bear, MD



ORTHOILLINOIS

Hand, Wrist, and Elbow Center of Excellence



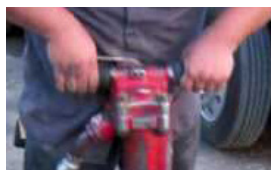
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**Kailey** - Lead Nurse ..... 815-398-9491  
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## Learn More About Dr. Bear

I would like to take this opportunity to tell you more about myself and my experience in health care. Originally from Winnetka, Illinois, I attended Northwestern University graduating in 1987, cum laude, president of Mortar Board Senior Honor Society and a member of Phi Beta Kappa. I continued my studies at Northwestern University School of Medicine, receiving my medical degree in 1991 as a member of Alpha Omega Alpha honor society. Following my graduation, I pursued advanced orthopedic training at Cornell Hospital for Special Surgery, which is ranked as the top orthopedic hospital in the United States. In addition, I completed a specialized training fellowship program in elbow and hand surgery at the Mayo Clinic.

My practice is focused on shoulder, elbow, hand, microvascular, traumatic, and reconstructive surgery. It is my mission to provide you compassionate care with expertise comparable to any major university center. I am humbled by my inclusion in two prestigious quality health care listings: as a Castle Connolly Regional Top Doctor®, and the Best Doctors® list. Earning a place on either list is a result of being nominated by other physicians and a thorough review by the listing organization into my background, professional achievements, patient satisfaction and positive treatment record. Inclusion on the Best Doctor® list is a direct result of other doctors selecting me as the person they would choose to treat themselves or a family member. These are honors I take very seriously and I am committed to maintaining the high standards they represent with all my patients.

I am actively involved in continuing education, have given numerous lectures, and published many orthopedic articles. As Clinical Associate Professor of Surgery at the University of Illinois College of Medicine, I have been awarded the Golden Apple teaching award and the Excellence in Teaching award. I am a reviewer for the acclaimed Journal of Shoulder and Elbow Surgery and currently serve as a faculty member at the Orthopedic Learning Center, where I teach other surgeons the latest techniques of hand, elbow and shoulder surgery. I hold Associate and Assistant Clinical Professor of Orthopedic Surgery positions respectively at University of Illinois College of Medicine in Rockford and Rush University Medical Center in Chicago where I help train medical students, family practice residents, and orthopedic surgery residents.

Please let me know if there is anything I can do to further improve your experience at OrthoIllinois. My goal is to provide the best medical care available to help you return to an active and pain-free lifestyle.

Sincerely,  
Brian Bear, M.D.

**Working together to provide a higher standard of care.** It is my goal as an orthopaedic surgeon to provide you the best possible care with compassion and respect. At OrthoIllinois, we utilize a team approach that allows

for the highest quality service and treatment. An integral part of the team is **Joseph Steiner, PA-C**. As a certified physician assistant (PA), Joe is an extension of my care and is highly trained to provide many office and hospital services as well as assist me in surgical procedures.



Joseph Steiner,  
PA-C

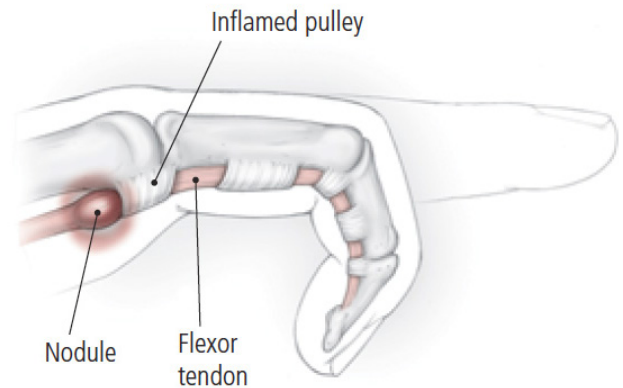
From your first visit to the completion of your treatment you will be seen by me or by Joe. We work together to offer a comprehensive evaluation and treatment plan to quickly return you to a healthy, active lifestyle.



## What is Trigger Finger / Trigger Thumb?

Trigger finger is a condition where a swollen area on a tendon that bends your finger or thumb develops. This is called a tendon nodule. The swollen tendon nodule can get stuck as it tries to pass beneath bands called pulleys. The nodule can irritate the pulley and cause it to become thicker, making the condition worse. The swollen tendon is larger than a normal tendon and it can get stuck as it tries to pass underneath the pulley and your finger can become stuck in a bent position. If you are able to straighten out your finger, you may feel a pop or click as the swollen tendon moves beneath the pulley.

### Trigger finger



## Surgical Treatment

The surgery is performed under a local anesthetic. Local anesthesia is the safest type of anesthesia. Dr. Bear or his assistant will simply numb up the affected finger or thumb with a very small needle. We use special techniques to minimize any discomfort. You do not need to have any sedatives, breathing tubes or general anesthetics. Once your hand is numb a tight band on our arm is inflated called a tourniquet. This is utilized to prevent bleeding. A small incision (less than 1/2 inch) is made in the palm of your hand in line with the affected finger. The irritated pulley is divided and this cures the triggering. If there is a lot of inflammation around the tendon, this is typically removed. Dr. Bear will confirm the triggering is corrected by asking you to fully open and close your finger. The triggering and catching should be gone. Usually only 3 to 4 stitches are needed to close the incision. A soft dressing is placed.

### \*\*\*\*Immediately After Surgery

After surgery you will be encouraged to fully open and close your fingers to avoid finger stiffness. Finger stiffness is a serious complication that can occur if you do not follow Dr. Bear's instructions to fully open and close your fingers after surgery.

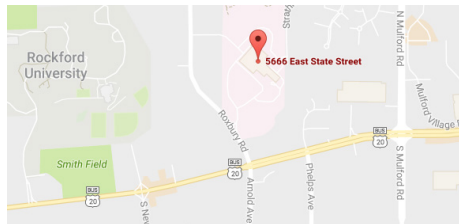
## Information to Keep in Mind Prior to Surgery

1. Please notify our office for any illness or conditions within one week prior to your scheduled surgery date. (E.g. skin abrasions, rashes, insect bites, pimples about the operative site, colds, and upper respiratory or urinary infections).
2. Please leave valuables (jewelry, contact lenses, etc.) at home.
3. If you are over 50 years of age, or if you have any significant medical problems including but not limited to heart disease, diabetes, lung disease, kidney disease, auto immune diseases, endocrine disorders, cancer, please ask Dr. Bear, his nurse Jessie or his surgery scheduler to determine if you need to see your medical doctor for written clearance prior to surgery. Patients with heart disease may need cardiac clearance from a Cardiologist. Ronda, our surgery scheduler can help you with this. Her phone number is 815-484-6969. Jessie, Dr. Bear's nurse's phone number is 815-398-9491.
4. If you have any disability forms or papers, please have these in our office at least one week prior to surgery. Do not bring them to the hospital. Allow approximately 5-7 business days to be completed.
5. Failure to arrive on time, some medical problems, and eating and drinking after midnight will cause your surgery to be cancelled for your safety.
6. Remember to wear loose fitting shirts or blouses that are able to fit over a bulky bandage that will be on your arm.

## THE SURGICAL EXPERIENCE

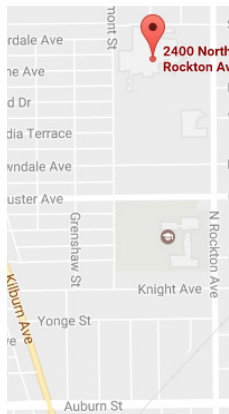
### Pre-Admission Guide for Surgery

❖ OrthoIllinois Surgery Center (346 Roxbury Rd. Rockford 61107)- If your surgery is scheduled at OrthoIllinois Surgery Center a nurse will contact you prior to the surgery date to go over instructions, your medications, your medical history, and answer any questions you may have.



❖ OSF St. Anthony Medical Center\* (5666 E. State St. Rockford 61108) - You will receive a call from a nurse at OSF to do a pre-anesthesia phone assessment. If any labs are needed per the hospital's anesthesia protocol, the nurse will inform you as to when you can go to the hospital to have those done. If you require a history and physical and medical clearance by your primary care physician and your doctor is not in the Rockford area or is not affiliated with OSF, then you may need to be seen by a hospitalist at the hospital to have your history and physical done for medical clearance. The nurse from OSF will also inform you when and where to have that done.

❖ SwedishAmerican Hospital\* (1400 Charles St. Rockford 61108)- You will receive a call from a nurse at SwedishAmerican Hospital to do a pre-anesthesia phone assessment. If any labs are needed per the hospital's anesthesia protocol, the nurse will inform you as to when you can go to the hospital to have those completed.



❖ Mercy Rockford Hospital\* (2400 N Rockton Ave. Rockford 61103) You will receive a call from a nurse at Mercy Health to do a pre-anesthesia phone assessment. If any labs are needed per the hospital's anesthesia protocol, the nurse will inform you as to when you can go into the hospital to have those done. If you require a history and physical and medical clearance by your primary care physician and your doctor is not in the Rockford area or affiliated with Mercy Health, you may need to be seen by a hospitalist at the hospital to have your history and physical done for medical clearance. Our surgery scheduler Ronda will be in contact with you to let you know when the hospital scheduled that appointment as well as a pre-anesthesia on-site assessment if required.

Your surgical experience includes three parts or phases. The **first** part or pre-operative phase is the time before your surgery. The **second** or intra-operative phase is the time you spend in surgery. The **third** or post-operative phase is the time immediately after your surgery and the first days following your surgery.

## ONCE ARRIVING AT THE HOSPITAL OR AMBLATORY SURGERY CENTER

### Before Your Surgery (Pre-operative phase)

1. An admission healthcare provider will take your information that is relative to your hospital or surgery center stay. A health care provider will discuss your medical history and you will sign a surgery consent form. This gives us permission to operate on your arm.
2. Since trigger finger / thumb surgery is performed under a local anesthetic, laboratory testing is not needed in most patients unless you're on a blood thinner call Warfarin or Coumadin or have a medical condition that affects blood clotting. In some cases labs may be required. Pre admission laboratory testing is typically performed prior to the day of surgery. All women of child bearing age who are undergoing general or regional anesthesia are required to take urine pregnancy test.
3. You will be taken into a room where you will wait for your time in surgery. This is called the pre-operative holding room. Nurses assigned to you will ask you some of the same questions the Admission Health Care Provider asked you. You will hear these questions over and over during your pathway to the operating room. **This is for your safety. Hearing the answers from you personally assures each health care provider of accurate information.** Medications, IV's etc. may be taken care of during this part of your stay.
4. You will need to change into a hospital gown. You may leave your underwear on (bras must come off).
5. The operating room will send for you about 15-30 minutes before your surgery. Although we make every attempt to run on schedule, for various reasons the operating room can be delayed. Your nurse will notify you if the operating room is on time or delayed. You may have 1-2 family members accompany you to this area. Your surgeon will see you in this area and **write his initials on the extremity that being operated on.** If you have hair on your arm in the area of surgery, your arm will be shaved with an electric hair clipper in this location.

6. If you are having a regional or a general anesthetic and if you have not met your anesthesiologist prior to this time, you will meet him/her here. The Anesthesiologist will be able to answer any questions regarding the type of anesthesia you will be having for your surgery. If you are having a regional anesthetic the anesthesiologist may perform this now.
7. If you have any last questions regarding the surgical procedure, this is the last time you will be able to ask the nurse, Dr. Bear's physician assistant or Dr. Bear.

### **During Your Surgery** (Inter-operative phase)

1. One of the nurses from your operating room will speak to you and will transport you to the operating room. You will see a lot of equipment and other team members when you enter the operating room. Do not be alarmed. All the staff is there to make sure that you have a positive experience.
2. You will be asked to move from your stretcher to another bed, called the operating room table. This room may be slightly chilly feeling and the nurse will provide you with a warm blanket.
3. A blood pressure cuff will be placed on your arm. An EKG pad (used to monitor the heart during surgery) will be placed on your back and an oxygen monitor will be placed on your finger. A safety strap will be placed across your legs above your knees. All of this is for your safety.
4. If an IV is needed, either your nurse or will start an IV in your hand if it has not already been done. Your nurse may give you fluids and medications through this IV.
5. Your hand will be numbed at this time. Dr. Bear or his assistant use the smallest needles available and special techniques to minimize any discomfort. Once your hand is numb, a tight band called a tourniquet is inflated on your upper arm to prevent any bleeding. This is typically on for only a few minutes..
6. When your surgery is complete you will be moved from the operating room table to another bed and taken to the second stage outpatient recovery room.



## After Your Surgery (Post-operative phase)

1. Your wrist will have a bandage on it. Your hand will still feel numb from the local anesthetic. Ice packs may be provided to help decrease postoperative pain and swelling. If you are experiencing pain, notify your nurse and pain medication will be administered to control the discomfort. Most patients have minimal pain after trigger finger surgery. Although we prescribe some narcotic containing pain medication, most people require minimal pain medication and only take it for 1-2 days after surgery.
2. In the second stage recovery area, your family will be able to see you. Once you are feeling well you will get dressed back into your clothes and be discharged to home from this location. Prescriptions for some mild pain medicine can be called into your pharmacy by the nursing staff. Federal law no longer allows phoning in prescriptions for Schedule II narcotic medication. This list includes Norco, Vicodin, Percocet, and OxyContin. Written prescriptions need to be given to you by the nursing staff for these types of medications before you leave the surgery center or hospital.
3. Dr. Bear or his physician assistant will be seeing you in the office 10-14 days after surgery. An appointment should already be scheduled for you. If you do not have a post surgery appointment scheduled, please call Sadie Carlton, Dr. Bear's office scheduler at 815-484-6996 to schedule a post surgery appointment.

## While You Recover at Home

1. You can eat normally if you have had a local anesthetic, If you have had a general anesthetic, the first meal should be clear liquids or broth.
2. An ice bag protected by a wash cloth should be applied to your hand for at least 20 minutes 4 times a day or more for the first 72 hours. **DO NOT USE HEAT**-this may increase swelling and discomfort.
3. If you have painful swelling, temperature **above** 101 degrees, redness around your incision or yellow drainage from your incision call Dr. Bear's office immediately at 815 -398-9491.
4. You may remove your dressing 5 days after surgery. You can get your wound wet in the shower 5 days after surgery. You are not allowed to submerge your hand completely under water but can wash your hand and take a shower. A light dressing consisting of gauze can be placed to protect your wound.
5. **Finger stiffness is a potential serious complication after Trigger Finger surgery. YOU SHOULD FULLY OPEN AND CLOSE FINGERS TO DECREASE FINGER STIFFNESS AND HAND SWELLING. FULLY OPENING AND CLOSING YOUR FINGERS IS RECOMMEND TO PREVENT STIFFNESS.**
6. Swelling and bruising may develop after surgery. This is normal.

**It is IMPORTANT to keep hand elevated above the heart to decrease swelling and avoid finger stiffness.**

**PROPER** sling position showing the hand above the heart.



**IMPROPER** sling position showing the hand **NOT** above the heart.



**PROPER** position of arm while sitting on coach





Commercially available cast protectors like this can be purchased at OrthoIllinois' The Store at the Roxbury campus, at FitRight Precision Orthotic & Prosthetic Lab at the Riverside Pavilion at Riverside and Mulford Road in Rockford, or at most drug stores.

## Commonly Asked Questions

1. ***Will I need assistance at home?***

\*No. Most people are ok after surgery and do not need help.

2. ***Do I have to pre-certify my surgery or will Dr. Bear's office do it?***

\*Ronda, (815-484-6969) Dr. Bear's Surgery Scheduler will help arrange pre certification from your insurance provider. Call her for any questions. Surgery cannot be scheduled until pre certification is obtained from your insurance provider.

3. ***What are some of the warning signs of an infection?***

\*Fever over 101 degrees, the incision becomes red or swollen, or yellow or green drainage is coming out of the wound. If any of these symptoms occur **IMMEDIATELY CALL DR. BEAR'S OFFICE AT 815-398-9491 TO BE SEEN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE BY DR. BEAR OR HIS PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT.**

4. ***Are there any complications from surgery?***

\*Complications are not common. Some complications can include, but are not limited to, surgical failure, infection, stiffness, blood vessel, nerve injury, or blood clots.

5. ***Will I need physical therapy?***

\*Yes. The majority of your therapy can be performed at your home with a detailed home exercise program. Formal hand therapy may be needed if finger stiffness develops or excessive scar tenderness develops.

Continued.

## Commonly Asked Questions (Continued)

6. ***Is swelling and pain normal?***

\* Yes. It is normal to experience some swelling and pain after your surgery. Applying ice will decrease the amount of pain and swelling you may have. Taking your pain medicine as directed should control the pain. It is recommend to take the prescribed pain medicine as soon as you start to feel uncomfortable rather than waiting for the pain to become unbearable. This is called staying ahead of your post surgical pain rather than reacting to it. The pain after surgery should decrease each day after surgery. Depending on the surgery performed, most patients are off narcotic pain medication by a maximum of 7 days after surgery. If you have no contra indications to anti-inflammatory medication like heartburn, reflux, stomach ulcers, or kidney abnormalities, anti-inflammatory medication can be taken for 2-4 weeks after surgery.

7. ***How long and often should I apply ice?***

\* An ice bag should be applied to your hand for 20 minutes 4- 8 times a day. More frequent applications with ice bags should be performed in the first 72 hours after surgery. Make sure the ice bag is well sealed to avoid getting your dressing wet with melted ice.

8. ***What if I am on a blood thinner?***

\* Common blood thinners include Coumadin, Warfarin, Lovenox, Plavix, Xarelto, aspirin. If you are on a blood thinner you will need to contact the prescriber of this medication to discuss stopping prior to surgery. The **COMMON** recommendations are listed below but you still will need to **CONTACT YOUR PRESCRIBER TO VERIFY**

- **Coumadin / Warfarin** must be stopped a minimum of one week prior to surgery. A Prothrombin time has to be obtained a day or two prior to surgery to make sure your blood is not too thin.

- **Plavix** must be stopped 6 days prior to surgery. No lab testing is needed

- **Xarelto** should be stopped 5 days before surgery. No lab testing needed

- **Lovenox** should be stopped 24 hours before surgery. No lab testing needed.

- **Aspirin** should be stopped 10 days prior to surgery. No lab testing needed.

9. ***What vitamins and supplements should be stopped?***

- Vitamin E can thin the blood. This should be stopped 7 days prior to surgery

- Fish oil can thin the blood. This should be stopped 7 days prior to surgery.

## What Can I Do After Surgery?

### **At HOME:**

#### **0 - 5 days after surgery:**

A 3 pound weight limit is allowed on the affected hand. No power gripping or vibrating tools.

#### **5 - 13 days after surgery:**

5 pound weight restriction. No power gripping or vibrating tools.

#### **2 weeks after surgery:**

15 pound weight restriction. No power gripping or vibrating tools.

#### **4 weeks after surgery:**

Return to normal activities without restrictions.

\*The surgical incision and the area on each side of the surgical incision may become tender and mildly swollen after surgery. You will feel some swelling and firmness about the incision during the healing phase. This is normal. The mild tenderness and swelling will resolve between 3-6 months after surgery. The pre surgery symptoms of trigger, locking and catching should be gone. If your tendons have a lot of inflammation around them, you may notice some mild creaking with finger bending. This is different than triggering. This typically decreases over the next few months.

### **At WORK:**

#### **0 - 4 days after surgery:**

No work allowed.

#### **5 -13 days after surgery:**

One-handed work only with the unaffected hand.

#### **2 weeks after surgery:**

15 pound weight restriction. No power gripping or vibrating tools.

#### **4 weeks after surgery:**

Return to normal activities without restrictions.

### **Can I take a shower or get my hand wet?**

Please refer to the “While You Recover a Home” section.