

Finger Dislocation Injuries: Proximal Interphalangeal (PIP) Joint



“Working with a knowledgeable hand therapist can make the difference between success and failure in complex hand surgical cases. The therapist extends the continuum of our care, as well as functioning as coach and trainer for our patients.”

MARYBETH EZAKI, MD, PAST PRESIDENT, AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR SURGERY OF THE HAND

What is a finger dislocation?

Finger dislocation is a common injury. It occurs when the bones of the finger are moved (dislocated) from their normal position. A dislocated finger can occur in any of the joints of any finger, but it occurs most often in the middle knuckle (PIP joint) of a finger. Types of dislocations are called dorsal, volar or lateral depending on the direction of the dislocated bone. There can be a fracture associated with a dislocation and also the ligaments surrounding the joint can be sprained or torn.

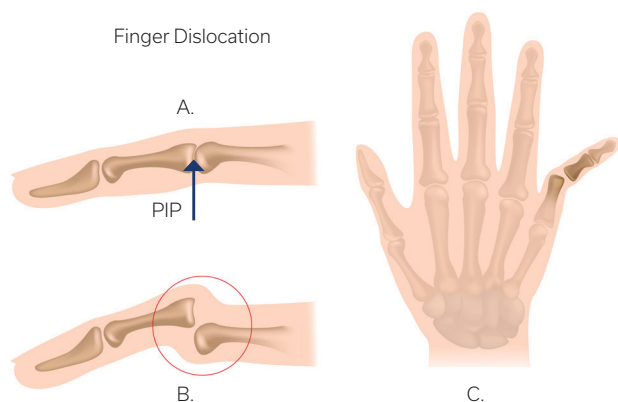


Illustration of a normal finger (A), (B: dorsal PIP dislocation) and (C: lateral PIP dislocation)

What are the symptoms of a finger dislocation?

A dislocated finger is usually obvious, but not always. The finger may appear crooked or bent and can be painful, swollen, bruised and difficult to move. There may be numbness or tingling and the finger may have a pale color. Some dislocations may cause the skin to tear.



Example of a lateral PIP dislocation after a motorcycle injury

What are the causes of a finger dislocation?

The most common causes of finger dislocations are sports or falls when the finger is twisted, bent or pushed backward forcefully. An object such as a ball hitting the finger can also cause the finger to dislocate.

What is the treatment for a finger dislocation?

Most finger dislocations can be treated without surgery. A physical examination and X-rays may be taken. Treatment usually consists of “putting the finger back in place” (reduction). It is then rested in an orthotic or buddy taped to its neighbor. Early exercise to bend the finger is generally begun once the finger is safe to be moved. If the dislocation is combined with a fracture and is not stable, surgery might be required.

What can a hand therapist do for me?

A hand therapist may fabricate a custom orthosis to protect the finger as it heals. Regaining the movement and strength of the hand will be a focus of treatment. A hand therapist works with the patient in order to achieve the best possible outcome after a finger dislocation.



Example of an orthosis to protect ring and small fingers dorsal dislocations