Specific Question:
In adults with trigger thumb/finger does splinting improve outcomes for pain and function compared to usual care?

Clinical bottom line
Currently there is no evidence to answer this question. It would be reasonable to continue the use of splinting as a therapeutic treatment option for adults with trigger finger/thumb in the absence of evidence to the contrary. There is however a need for clinical audit and research in order to provide further evidence.

Why is this important?
Splintage for the management of trigger finger and thumb is a relatively new concept in hand therapy and from a clinicians' perspective it can be beneficial conservative treatment for the condition. There are however several types of splint available both custom made and fabricated. Selecting the most appropriate splint is important therefore in the treatment of this condition to try and relieve pain whilst maximising function.

Search timeframe (e.g. 2005-2016)

Inclusion Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Search terms</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population and Setting</td>
<td>Male and female adults (age 18 years over) with trigger finger or thumb</td>
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<td>Intervention or Exposure</td>
<td>Bespoke or fabricated finger &amp; thumb splints</td>
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<td>Comparison, if any</td>
<td>Type of splint</td>
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Outcomes of interest

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<th>Pain scale Function</th>
<th>Pain &amp; functional scales</th>
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Types of studies

| RCT’s Systematic reviews |

Routine Databases Searched

CINAHL, MEDLINE, EMBASE, AMED, BNI, Google Scholar

Date of search- 10th March 2015 & 4th January 2016 (Recurring search alert)

Results of the search

- 8 Unique studies downloaded
- 5 Potentially relevant
- 1 Included study
- 4 Excluded studies
  - 1 used splintage in comparison to injection and was an outdated article; 3 used other forms of treatment i.e. Exercises/steroid injection in addition to trigger finger splinting so unable to directly answer our question.
### Table 1- Detail of included studies

<table>
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<tr>
<th>First Author, year and type of study</th>
<th>Population and setting</th>
<th>Intervention or exposure tested</th>
<th>Study results</th>
<th>Assessment of quality and comments</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tarbhai. K et al (2012) Prospective randomised study</td>
<td>30 subjects with unilateral or bilateral trigger finger/thumb. Canada – Toronto Western Hospital (university-affiliated teaching hospital)</td>
<td>N=15 digits randomly to an MCP blocking splint and n=17 digits randomly allocated to a DIP blocking splint. Both groups instructed to wear the splint as much as possible over a 24hr period and to keep a diary. Assessment measures included pain (VAS), frequency of triggering, scale for severity of triggering and functional impact of triggering, ROM and grip strength. Parameters assessed at day 0, week 1,3,6,12 and 1 year</td>
<td>Both groups showed statistically significant improvement in triggering; however the MCP joint blocking splint was successful in providing at least partial relief of triggering and pain in 10 of 13 trigger finger subjects, whereas the DIP joint blocking splint provided at least partial relief of triggering and pain in 7 of 15 subjects after 6 weeks of treatment. The significant improvement was maintained in a minority of the cohort for 1 year. There was little difference between the two splint groups for impact on function. Subjects who wore the MCP joint blocking splint reported higher rates of comfort compared with those who wore the DIP joint blocking splint.</td>
<td>Did use a valid and reliable functional score. Sample size was small however they did undertake a power analysis but further subjects were discounted as they had opted for a steroid injection or surgery if no progress was made. 13 subjects remained in each splint group which was the minimum requirement to meet the power analysis. No control group. Didn't state whether the improvements were in those with more or less severe triggering.</td>
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### Summary

CAT Lead: Suzanne Sharp  
Date CAT completed: September 2016  
Email: Suzanne.sharp@sath.nhs.uk  
Review Date: 2018-2020
There is a paucity of evidence to determine the efficacy of splintage in the treatment of trigger finger/thumb in adults. The best available evidence is that of Tarbhai et al (2012) as above but is of very limited value due to flaws in research methodology. Nevertheless it suggests that the use of splintage is warranted as a treatment option, with an MCP joint splint being the preferred option by patients for comfort.

**Implications for Practice/research**

There is a need for more evidence/research into this area. There is no evidence to say that the use of splints is detrimental to the patient so current practice can continue, however an audit of efficacy of current splints used would be a good starting point for future research.

**What would you tweet? (140 characters)**

There is no conclusive evidence for splintage in the treatment of adult trigger finger, however MCP joint splints may well be still considered worthwhile from a clinicians perspective in the absence of evidence to the contrary.

**References**