

HEALTH

Your guide to keeping fit and looking good

ASK DR. GOTT

Meat is not the only source of protein for a healthy diet.

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In good hands

Lake County orthopedic surgeon's procedure regenerates damaged fingers

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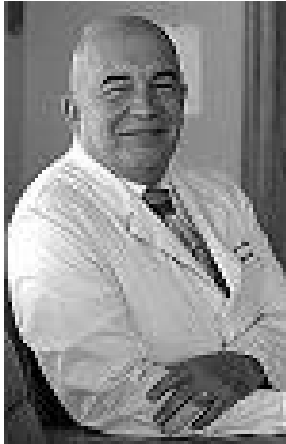
Starfish can regrow their arms, salamanders can regrow their tails, and orthopedic surgeon Dr. Thomas Becker is claiming it's possible that humans could have the realistic ability to regrow severed fingers.

Becker's technique, called the Regen-it, offers patients an alternative to surgery that provides equal or better results with good sensation and good cosmetic appearance without loss to the length of the finger. With a successful procedure, patients can return to work within a week after sustaining severe finger injuries.

With more than 150 patients who have had the procedure performed successfully, Becker said the development of saving fingers has evolved rather rapidly in just the last few years.

Usually patients who severed a finger would arrive at the emergency room and have a doctor clean the area, apply a few stitches and discard the severed part of the finger, resulting in a shorter digit. In cases where the bone is exposed the treatment involves a shorter finger, loss of sensation and a second surgery.

With the Regen-it procedure, a patient's entire finger has the ability to be saved with little pain involved in the healing process. It is the first non-surgical treatment for this type of injury in the U.S.



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Dr. Thomas Becker specializes in orthopedic and hand surgery and finger regeneration.

Becker said the surgery is less risky for patients than surgery because they do not develop scar tissue and they regain more sensation in their fingertips. The method also allows finger regeneration without using tissue from other parts of the body.

The key to the whole procedure is trying to save the bone that will allow the tissue to retransform and achieve some finger growth.

A quick and full recovery from the injury is a specially designed, lightweight cast that protects the damaged finger from further injury or possible infection. Becker has custom-ized the cast to hold an antibiotic cream and an occlusive dressing in place to allow the patients to not only heal, but



Dr. Thomas Becker shows a protective finger cast.

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The two broken fingers of a 3-year-old boy who got his fingers caught in the spokes of a bicycle. This is a day-one photo.



This is at 7½ weeks of healing.

to continue to work without restrictions.

"People don't have time to take days off from their jobs to heal from an injury," he said. "My patients want to be able to get back to work as quickly as possible. That is what this cast allows them to do."

Becker said his cast has developed from a bulky, immovable wrap, to a more flexible device that is comfortable and simple.

However, Becker said his ultimate goal now is to get more orthopedic hand surgeons to adopt his technique. However, many doctors are unwilling to revert from the traditional surgical procedures.

"It has been my experience, given the choice, patients will elect for non-surgical methods over surgical," he said. **"This technique can be done by a non-surgical physician easily."**

In his attempt to spread the word about his technique, Becker has developed a regeneration kit that he hopes patients and doctors will be able to use as well. With FDA approval pending, Becker is hoping to market the kit to primary care doctors, patients and the insurance industry.

"Everything is developing so fast today," he said. I don't know what we will be able to do in the next few years when it comes to regrowing body parts. It's an exciting time for me right now."