

## PATIENT INFORMATION

# Osteo-Arthritis of the Hands

## Advice and treatment

### Osteoarthritis of the Hands – What is it?

Osteoarthritis is a condition which affects many joints in the body but most commonly in the hand. The surface of the joint (cartilage) gets thinner, the surrounding bone grows thicker and there can be joint swelling due to excess fluid

It can affect men and women, it mainly affects women around the time of the menopause and most commonly affects the joints at the ends of the fingers and base of the thumb, although other finger joints can also be affected. Symptoms may come and go, but the pain often stops after several years leaving joints that work well.

There are ways that you can help reduce the pain in your hands and improve the movement, described in this leaflet, and in the Versus Arthritis booklet or website.

### What are the symptoms?

**Sharp or aching pain** – usually with movement & activity and often reduces with rest.

**Stiffness** – often after you've been resting.

**Tenderness** if you press on / squeeze the affected joint.

You may feel the joint(s) **clicking or grating** and find it is becoming more difficult or painful to stretch and bend your fingers.

You may notice that the joints look more **swollen** or prominent.

Activities that are commonly described as being difficult include: Opening a jar or can; turning a key; gripping heavy objects such as a kettle; writing for long periods of time.

## How can you help yourself?

- **Reduce the stress** on your joints by pacing out activities through the day rather than tackling them all in one go.
- **Spread the load** over several joints i.e. use both hands. Avoid actions that push your hands into awkward positions. Do not grip for long periods.
- **Joint protection** – Stop the activity if pain is severe or use a gadget e.g. a jar opener, pencil grip or chunky peeler.
- **Hand exercises** – these exercises aim to reduce your pain and improve your movement and grip strength.



### ☞ Knuckle Bends

Bend the knuckle joints of all your fingers keeping the other finger joints straight. Hold for 5 seconds.

### Finger Bends ☞

Keep your big knuckles straight and bend the first 2 joints in your fingers – hold for 5 seconds and then straighten out.

Bend your fingers and try to touch the base of your hand as shown – hold for 5 seconds then straighten out.

Try to make a full fist, hold for 5 seconds then straighten out.

Repeat all exercises 5-10 times, 3 times daily.

It is important to move your fingers as far as possible, you might need to use your other hand to help ease your fingers down or try doing the exercises in warm water.



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## Flare up management.

Flare ups are common with arthritis but there are ways to deal with them:

- **What** have you been doing to cause the flare?
- **Pain relief** – speak to your GP or pharmacist.
- **Hot or cold packs** can ease pain and swelling.
- **Splint and supports** can help you rest after activity or be worn during activity – these can be “off the shelf” or bespoke splints and are available from a variety of sources.
- **Do not stop exercising** – ease up on the intensity but you must keep your joints moving.

If you have any concerns, please contact: **Crow Thorne Hand Therapy Centre**

☎ **01803 654935**

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[www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk](http://www.torbayandsouthdevon.nhs.uk)

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For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.