

## PATIENT INFORMATION

# Osteo-Arthritis of the Thumb

## Advice and Treatment

### Osteoarthritis of the thumb base - what is it?

Osteoarthritis at the base of the thumb (the carpometacarpal joint), is the most common site to get arthritis in the upper limb. The surface of the joint (cartilage) thins, and the surrounding bone thickens. It is more common in women and is unusual before the age of 45 years.



### What are the symptoms?

The main symptoms of thumb base OA are pain (which can be an ache or sometimes a stabbing pain) and stiffness. You may feel the joint clicking or grating and find it increasingly difficult to stretch your thumb out to the side. You may notice that the joint looks more swollen or prominent – this is very common.

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

### What can you do to help yourself?

- **Reduce the stress** on your joints by pacing out activities through the day i.e. spread jobs such as housework, gardening, and crafts through the day, rather than trying to tackle them all in one go. Adopt the 'little but often' approach.
- Try **spreading the load** over several joints i.e. use both hands instead of one. Avoid actions that push your thumb into awkward positions. Do not grip for long periods.
- **Remember joint protection** - Stop the activity if pain is > 4/10, or use a gadget such as a jar opener, pencil grip, large handled peeler.
- Carry out the **thumb exercises** in this leaflet. Evidence suggests that certain exercises along with the above advice do have a beneficial effect on reducing your pain and improving your grip strength.

- Use a thumb splint to support your thumb when carrying out tasks that cause pain to the thumb e.g.:
  - Promedics elasticated thumb spica (plastic flexible bar support) [www.promedics.co.uk](http://www.promedics.co.uk)
  - KSA neoprene thumb spica (metal rigid bar support). [www.ketteringsurgical.co.uk](http://www.ketteringsurgical.co.uk)

## Thumb exercises

### 1) Widen the Web space.

Tight muscles in the web space prevents the thumb moving away from the palm and leads to thumb deformity in later years. Try one of the following:



Pinch the web-space to find a tender spot. Hold or massage gently until it softens – it may take 3-5 mins.

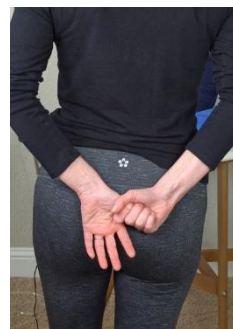
Use a clip or peg to pinch the tender spot – it may take 3-5 minutes to soften.



### 2) Distraction of the thumb joint.

Applying a stretching force on the thumb joint may help relieve stress on the joint and ease thumb pain.

With hands behind your back, grasp your entire thumb firmly with your opposite hand. Relax and allow the weight of your arms to pull on your thumb.



### 3) Exercises for stability

Strong muscles at the base of your thumb will provide a stable support for your thumb to function.



Make a C shape in the air as if holding a ball. Tighten your muscles in that position 5-10 seconds then relax (10 repetitions x 3 daily).



Touch the tip of your thumb to the side of your index finger. Rock your thumb in and out (x10 x 3 daily).

***Do not repetitively squeeze a ball or pinch things that hurt.***

If you have any concerns, please contact:

**Crow Thorne Hand Therapy Centre**

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☎ 01803 654935

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

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