

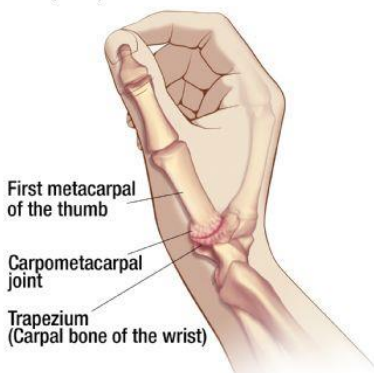
# Osteoarthritis of the thumb

## Patient Information

### What is Osteoarthritis (OA)?

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis affecting over 8 million people in the UK. When a joint starts to develop OA the cartilage covering the joint gradually becomes rough and worn, and the joints can become stiff and painful. Sometimes the joints can change shape and making a clicking or cracking noise when they move. Inside an affected joint, healing and repairing is taking place which is referred to as inflammation. As a result bony growths may appear and the capsule and ligaments surrounding the joint can become thicker to help keep the joint stable which can lead to a loss of movement in the affected joint. In the thumb, the joint most commonly affected is the carpo-metacarpal joint at the thumb base.

CMC (Basal) Joint Arthritis



### Causes of osteoarthritis

- It is more commonly a problem in people over 40 years, particularly females
- Previous injury, surgery or other joint disease at the affected joint
- Some occupations and repetitive activities could contribute.

<https://www.ohmyarthritis.com/CMC-thumb-arthritis.html>

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## **Living with osteoarthritis**

For a joint to develop osteoarthritis some or all of the cartilage will have worn away which allows the bones to rub together during movement. This can result in a 'toothache' or nagging pain to develop. You may also experience a sharper pain on activity.

Pain affects people in very different ways and the level of pain experienced can vary greatly. People who have x-rays that show a large amount of osteoarthritis do not necessarily report lots of pain or limitation in activities of daily living and vice versa.

Other symptoms of osteoarthritis in the thumb include: stiffness particularly in the morning or after rest; a reduced range of movement affecting function and grip strength; weakness or swelling.

Osteoarthritis is a slow process that develops over several years. In many cases deterioration can be slowed, and improvements made through task modification, pain management, targeted exercise and splinting where appropriate.

## **Pain management**

It is important to take notice of pain and to learn what triggers the pain – don't ignore it. You may need to use pain killers and /or try using a microwaveable heat pack or a wrapped hot water bottle. Fine thermal fingerless gloves can also be really useful. Some people find simple relaxation techniques helpful.

## **Task modification**

Change the way you carry out activities to reduce pain and the pressure through your thumb base. e.g. – carrying plates underneath rather than at the side to avoid taking the weight through your thumbs.

Avoid prolonged periods of holding the same position which will tire muscles and therefore lessen the support they give to the joint.

Plan tasks throughout the day / week to balance out heavier jobs and take regular breaks from an activity.

Use **Joint protection** principles when doing a task

- Take notice of any pain – it can be a warning. Look at how you are carrying out an activity
- Use larger, stronger joints where possible – carry bags over your elbow or shoulder or better still use a backpack. Hold books on the palm of your hand
- Reduce effort by using 'gadgets'- larger built up handles, electric tin openers, water boilers, thicker 'easy flow' pens
- Spread the load over several joints – use as much of the surface of the hands as you can

## Exercises

Exercises performed daily may help to reduce joint stiffness and improve and maintain range of movement. Exercises should not be painful, although initially your joints may ache as the muscles start to stretch. Increase the amount of exercise gradually. You may find it easier to carry the exercises out in warm water and use a heat pack afterwards to relax the muscles. Start with a few repetitions of each and gradually increase, aiming for 2 sets of 10 repetitions.

1. Move your thumb away from your index finger, trying to drive the movement from your thumb base and return.



2. Touch the tip of each finger in turn with your thumb bringing your thumb back level with your palm and straightening each time. Try to make an 'O' shape between thumb and finger.



3. Place the little finger side of your hand on the table with your fingers relaxed. Lift your thumb up away from your palm and bring it out as if you are holding a cup. Relax and repeat



4. Place the little finger side of your hand on the table. Lift your thumb up to a hitch hike position keeping the tip bent



## **Splints**

There are a wide variety of splints available, but it is important to make sure that you are wearing the right splint for you. The main aim of a splint is to stabilise and support the joint during activity but they also help by providing warmth and some compression. As it is supportive the splint can also take over the role of the muscles around the joint making them weaker so it is important that you remove it regularly to carry out exercises and only wear it when you have been instructed to do so.

Splints can also be used to provide pain relief during rest.

## **Further Information**

If you would like to seek the advice of a physiotherapist/hand therapist, there are a number of options within Wiltshire. Please speak to your GP practice about the ways you can be referred.

Alternatively, you can visit our website for further information on accessing our services;

<https://wiltshirehealthandcare.nhs.uk/physiotherapy/>

## **Other useful websites;**

You can access general education and advice on managing osteoarthritis on the Versus Arthritis website

<https://www.versusarthritis.org>

## **Safeguarding**

Wiltshire Health and Care (WHC) are committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk of abuse, including victims and survivors of domestic abuse. We expect all WHC staff to share this commitment and promote safeguarding by implementing WHC policies and procedures, act promptly on concerns and share information appropriately.

If you or your carer have any concerns regarding a child or adult's safety, please phone Wiltshire Safeguarding Team on 0300 456 0111 (Adult) or 0300 456 0108 (Child) (9am – 5pm Monday - Friday) or please call 999 if you feel they are in immediate danger.

## **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

If you have any questions, or concerns, suggestions or compliments about our service, please speak to a member of staff.

This information sheet is available in other languages and formats. If you would like a copy, please contact us on 0300 123 7797 and [whc.pals@nhs.net](mailto:whc.pals@nhs.net)

## **Patient and Public Involvement**

We value your opinions which will help us to further develop our services.

If you wish to provide feedback or get involved in our patient participation groups, please email the Patient and Public Involvement Officer at [ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net](mailto:ask.wiltshirehealthandcare@nhs.net) or telephone 01249 454386. Please scan the QR code below to access the Friends and Family Test survey.

