

Osteoarthritis of the thumb

Advice and treatment

Osteoarthritis is an age-related condition that can cause joints to become painful and stiff. It is the most common type of arthritis in the UK.

As part of the normal aging process and through normal living our joint are exposed to stress. For some this doesn't cause any symptoms, but for others these normal age related changes produce pain and stiffness and we would call this osteoarthritis.

This can sometimes cause pain, swelling and difficulty moving the joint.

Signs and symptoms

Osteoarthritis affects people in different ways, but more often it develops over many years as part of the normal aging process.

Symptoms of osteoarthritis include:

- Pain at the base of the thumb, especially with gripping and/or pinching activities
- Stiffness after periods of rest / sleep
- Swelling or deformity of the joint
- Aching after a period of prolonged use
- Loss of strength in gripping and/or pinching activities
- Decreased range of movement of the thumb



You can find out more about Osteoarthritis – including causes, symptoms and treatment suggestions – from the NHS website

NHS website [nhs.uk/conditions/osteoarthritis/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/osteoarthritis/)

Treating osteoarthritis of the thumb

What you can do

Recovery involves easing the symptoms, and gradually increasing your exercise to build up your strength around your thumb.

Consider the following to help manage your symptoms:

- Relative Rest – limiting activities and taking regular breaks may help reduce your pain, as well as changing the position of your hand when gripping, pinching, wringing or twisting
- Wearing a splint – a thumb-spica splint may ease your pain by limiting the movement of your thumb during repetitive aggravating activities
- Applying heat (for example, hot water bottle) or cold (for example, a bag of frozen peas wrapped in a damp tea-towel) to the tender area for 10 minutes twice a day can help reduce pain – however please don't do this if your skin sensation is impaired
- Using aids – such as jar openers or kettle tippers to help reduce stress on your thumb
- Taking your time – do activities in smaller parts and take regular breaks

Anti-Inflammatory tablets and gels can help reduce your painful symptoms. Please talk to your GP or pharmacist for further advice.

Exercises

The following exercises can help reduce pain. If you feel further pain during these exercises, then take a break and rest.



Support your elbow on a table.

Bring your thumb away from the index finger.

Repeat 10 times.

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Place the palm of your hand on a table.

and lift your thumb off the table, hold for 1 second and lower

Repeat 10 times.

This leaflet is intended to support the advice you've received from your GP and Physiotherapist.
The exercise diagrams have been created by Physiotools.

The Physiotools website [physiotools.com](https://www.physiotools.com)

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