

Exercises and strengthening for thumb osteoarthritis

This leaflet provides information on exercises for patients with osteoarthritis in the thumb, who are under the care of the hand therapy team at St George's Hospital. If you have any further questions on the information in this leaflet, please speak directly to your therapist.

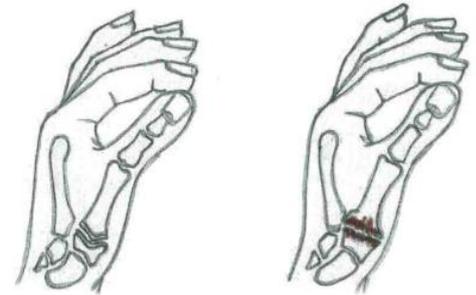
What is osteoarthritis and why have I got it?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a disease that affects your joints. Over time, the surfaces of your joints become damaged and they do not move as smoothly as they should. There are many factors which can contribute to you getting OA including age, gender, pre-existing joint injuries and joint abnormalities.

What are the signs and symptoms?

OA can often affect the joint at the base of your thumb. You may find that the joint becomes swollen and tender over time and you may notice a small 'step' appear in the bone at the base of your thumb. This can be painful to touch especially if it is knocked or bumped. You may also find that pinching/picking up small objects becomes difficult.

The following exercises are designed to help keep the joints in your thumb and fingers from getting stiff and to improve the strength in your muscles. Your therapist will advise which exercises are going to be most useful for you.



A 'normal thumb joint'

An 'arthritic thumb joint'

Exercises

Stretch

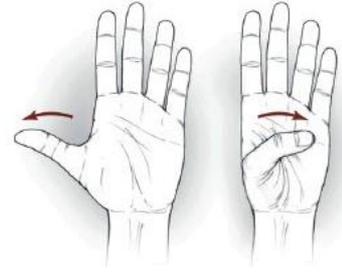
Prior to commencing your exercises try to warm your affected hand using a heat pack/hot water bottle, or by soaking your hand in a bowl of warm water. Do this for up to five minutes.

After this, use your unaffected hand to gently massage the muscle in between your thumb and index finger. If you're able to, try to move your thumb away from your index finger whilst massaging to improve the stretch. Try to hold this stretch for 30 seconds and then relax.

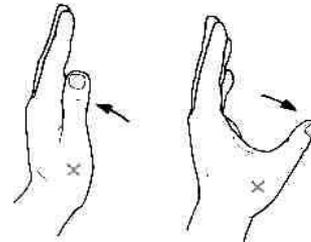
Movement Exercises

The following exercises are designed to encourage normal movement of the fingers and thumb:

1. Rest the little finger side of your hand on a flat surface. Gently bend the thumb towards the little finger and slowly lift back up to straight.



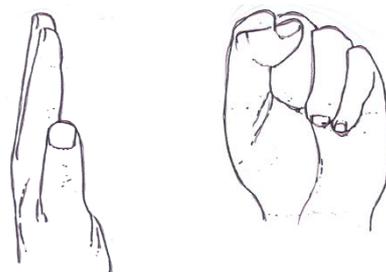
2. Move your thumb into the side of your hand, in line with your index finger. Spread your thumb as far away from your hand as possible, staying in line with the index finger. Move your thumb back towards your palm.



3. Resting your palm on a flat surface, spread your thumb out as far as possible, away from your palm. Think about the movement coming from the base of your thumb by the wrist. Don't try to overextend the other joints of your thumb.



4. Gently straighten all your fingers into a full stretch, and then gently make a fist.



Strengthening Exercises

The following exercises are designed to strengthen the small muscles that support and move your thumb:

5. With your thumb and fingers lightly gripping a tennis ball, gently squeeze against the ball and relax.



6. Still using a tennis ball, keep your thumb resting on the ball in a stable position. Lift your index and middle fingers away from the ball. Gently squeeze your thumb against the ball and relax.



7. Resting the hand on a tennis ball, place an elastic band round your fingers as shown. Straighten your index finger and then move it sideways, away from your middle finger.



8. Make a loose fist; place an elastic band around your fingers and thumb, keeping your palm on a flat surface. Keeping the tip joint of your thumb bent, slide your thumb away from your hand keeping it in contact with the table. Return your hand to a resting position



Additional Exercises/Instructions:

Useful sources of information

Arthritis Research UK

Copeman House, St Mary's Court,
St Mary's Gate, Chesterfield S41 7TD

Phone: 0300 790 0400

Website: www.arthritisresearchuk.org

Arthritis care

Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street
London, EC1N 8EQ

Phone: 0808 800 4050

Website: www.arthritiscare.org.uk

Contact us

If you have any questions regarding the information provided in this leaflet, please feel free to discuss them with your therapist at your next appointment. For more urgent queries the team can be contacted on the **treatment enquiries** phone number listed below.

Your therapist is _____

Treatment enquiries: 020 8725 1038 (answer phone only)

Appointments: 020 8725 0007

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

