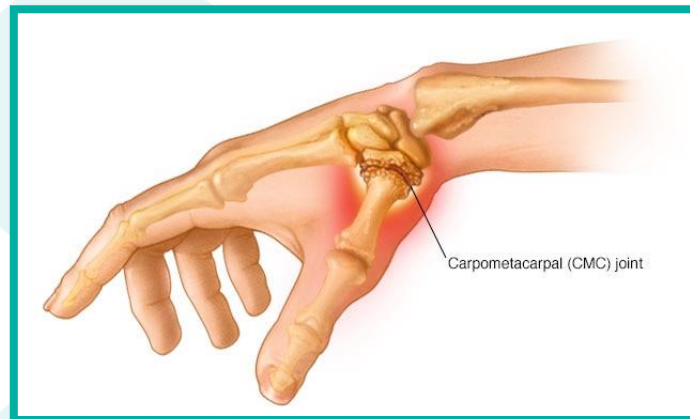




OA Thumb information & Exercise

# Osteoarthritis of the Thumb





## Causes

Osteoarthritis is the most common form of arthritis and can affect any joint. The smooth tissue that covers the end of the bone wears away and becomes thinner and rough. The underlying bone attempts to heal but usually over grows ultimately changing the shape of the joint.

Osteoarthritis becomes more common with increasing age. This is due to the natural aging process and the body's ability to repair becoming less as you get older.

It is thought to have a genetic link and can run in families.

Women are more likely to develop osteoarthritis compared with men.

Osteoarthritis can also develop following trauma or previous injury or fracture to the thumb. Excessive use of the hands related to your occupation, lifestyle or hobbies is also thought to contribute.

## Symptoms

### Pain

This is usually felt at the base of the thumb and sometimes into the wrist. The pain increases with activities that involve using your thumb like gripping and settles with rest

### Swelling

Swelling or thickening of the joint can be seen at the base of the thumb

### Reduced grip strength

You may find it difficult to grip, pick up objects or do up your buttons

### Stiffness and loss of movement

The thumb may feel stiff following periods of rest/inactivity and first thing in the morning

### Deformity

In the later stages of the condition, the thumb may collapse and loss its shape

Your doctor or physiotherapist may order bloods and/or x-rays to rule out any cause of your symptoms but this is not always necessary.

### Activity Modification

Avoid or modify activities that cause your thumb to be painful, try to find different ways of doing these activities. For example:

- Instead of holding a cup of tea with one hand, try to use both hands.
- Shift or slide heavy objects rather than lift them
- Use a pen grip to increase the size of your grip

### Pain Relief

Over the counter pain relief medication can be used to reduce your pain so you can be more active or complete your exercises.

All medications have side effects and must be used carefully. Paracetamol and ibuprofen are the most common over the counter pain killers. However, some medical conditions will prevent you from taking them so, you should always check with your GP or Pharmacist to ensure they are safe for you.

If you decide to take pain medication it is important to take them at the recommended dose and to take them regularly to prevent a flare up of your symptoms and allow you to remain active and continue exercising.

Don't wait until your pain is severe before taking the pain killers as they won't work as well.

### Ice/Heat

Using Ice to cool or Heat to warm the painful area can be helpful in managing pain, swelling and help the healing process. The smaller the body area the less time you will need to keep the ice or heat on. Start with 5 minutes but no more than 15/20 minutes per body part.

Use a damp towel between yourself and ice to prevent any cold burns. Use a dry towel between yourself and the heat to prevent heat burns. Regularly check your skin while using ice or heat and remove immediately if any burns or injury occurs. Only use heat/ice if your skin sensation is normal.

Use Ice for Pain relief or after activity/exercise.  
Use heat for pain relief or before activity/exercise.



## Splinting

Splints are designed to be worn when performing tasks that aggravate your symptoms. These can be bought from most pharmacies or off the internet.

A splint can also be worn for comfort and may help to settle symptoms.



## Corticosteroid injection

If your symptoms are severe, or not improving after trying the previous advice AND exercises then you may be offered a corticosteroid injection. This can help to ease the pain, making physiotherapy more comfortable for you.

A corticosteroid will only reduce your pain therefore it is important to re-start your exercises usually after 2 weeks to gain the full benefits from this treatment option.

Some individuals may not be able to receive this treatment due to their current health or types of medicines they are already taking.

## Surgical Opinion

Only in severe cases are patients referred onto secondary care for opinion on surgery. This involves removing one of the bones at the base of the thumb – a trapeziectomy.

## Further Information

**Arthritis Research UK:**  
[www.arthritisresearchuk.org](http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org)

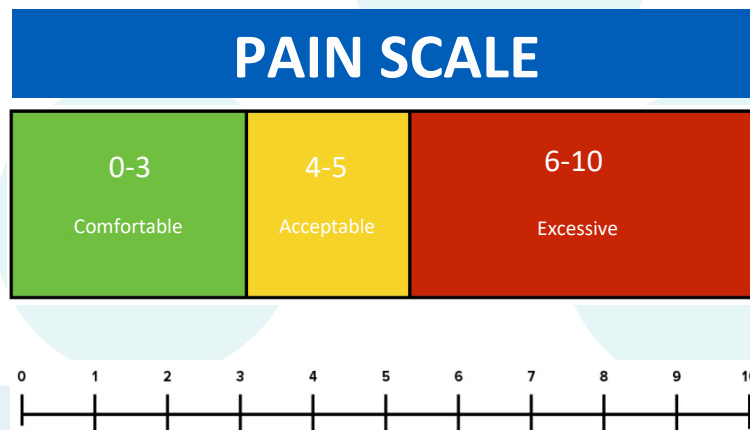
**NHS Inform**  
[www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)

Pain during exercises should be manageable. Aim to stay within the green and amber zones. If experiencing excessive pain then you can modify the exercise, and then slowly build it back up over time;

- Reduce the range of movement
- Reduce repetitions
- Reduce the resistance/weight being used
- Slower, less intensity and control the movement more
- Increase the rest between each set of exercises

Progress onto the next stage of exercise once they become easier and you can fully complete the exercises in the comfortable zone of the pain scale.

- Pain after exercise should settle to your pre exercise levels within 30-60 minutes.
- Pain or stiffness due to exercise in the next morning should not last longer than 60 minutes.
- Use your pain relief, ice/heat or anything else you have found that eases your symptoms to help manage.





### Thumb Stretch

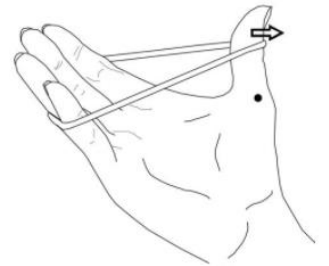


Hold your hand in the air or flat on a table. Hold onto your thumb and gently pull this backwards away from the palm of your hand.

Hold for 5-10 seconds | Repeat 3-4 times | Perform 1 times daily

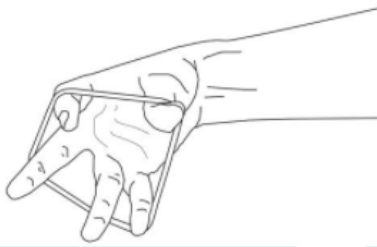
### Thumb Extension Strength

Hold your hand in the air in a comfortable position. Place an elastic band around the thumb and fingers. Start with your fingers and thumb together side by side. Pull the thumb away from the fingers as far as comfortable.



Repeat 10 times | Repeat 3-4 times | Perform 1 times daily

### Thumb Abduction Strength



Hold your hand in the air in a comfortable position. Place an elastic band around the thumb and fingers. Start by placing the thumb together with the little finger. Pull the thumb away from the fingers as far as comfortable.

Repeat 10 times | Repeat 3-4 times | Perform 1 times daily