

Arthritis Makes Simple Tasks Difficult

Thumb Osteoarthritis is much more common in women beginning in their fifties



Orthopedic Surgeon Pamela Jones, MD, a board certified orthopedic surgeon, is also board certified in the subspecialty of hand and upper extremity surgery.

If you have a noticeable ache or pain at the base of your thumb that is aggravated by the weather, you could have osteoarthritis of the thumb.

This condition, also known as carpo-metacarpal joint arthritis, is caused when the gliding surface (cartilage) of a joint becomes worn and degraded resulting in a painful and stiff joint. It's common, generally appears when people are in their fifties, and is much more prevalent in women.

"The aching sensation and pain often increase when doing something as simple as grasping with the hand or pinching, and when severe, it can be present even while the hand is at rest," said Orthopedic Surgeon Pamela Jones, MD, who is board certified in orthopedic surgery as well as board certified in the sub-specialty of hand and upper extremity surgery.

Other symptoms include weakness and deformity of the thumb. Thumb arthritis can cause severe hand pain, swelling, decreased strength and decreased range of motion, making it difficult to do simple household tasks, like opening jars.

"Osteoarthritis is primarily caused from wear and tear, but contributing factors include a previous

injury, repetitive movements, especially related to work, loose joints and the aging process," said Board

For joint replacement, called arthroplasty, the arthritic joint is replaced or resurfaced. Sometimes the trapezium

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Certified Orthopedic Surgeon Richard Choi, MD, who specializes in hand surgery.

Your doctor will ask about symptoms, look for swelling or lumps on joints, and may press on the base of the thumb while rotating the joint to see if it produces a grinding sound or pain, which points to worn cartilage and bones rubbing against each other. X-rays can reveal bone spurs, worn cartilage and loss of joint space — all indications of thumb arthritis.

"Initial treatment is usually non-surgical with options that include a splint, usually worn at night to help decrease pain, encourage proper positioning and rest the joint," said Orthopedic Surgeon Crawford Campbell, MD who is board certified in orthopedic surgery as well as hand and upper extremity surgery. "We also recommend physical therapy, oral non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications, and cortisone injections into the joint before we consider surgery."

If non-surgical techniques are not effective, there are surgical procedures such as joint replacement and joint fusion.



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bone is removed and tendons are rerouted to act as a spacer or cushion between the arthritic thumb bone and the rest of the wrist bones.

Joint fusion, called arthrodesis, is usually reserved for younger patients who use their hands for heavy labor. Thumb bones are fused to increase strength but joint mobility is lost.

Holy Family Hospital and Merrimack Valley Hospital have highly qualified teams of orthopedic surgeons, all expertly trained to meet the needs of the communities we serve. To locate an orthopedic surgeon, visit www.Steward.org/doctorfinder or call 1-800-488-5959.

RISK FACTORS FOR THUMB OSTEOARTHRITIS

- Being female
- Being age 40 or older
- Hereditary conditions
- Injuries to the joint, such as fractures and sprains
- Diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis which change the normal structure/function of cartilage
- Activities/jobs that put high stress on the joint

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF THUMB OSTEOARTHRITIS

- Swelling, stiffness and tenderness at the base of your thumb
- Decreased strength when pinching or grasping objects
- Decreased range of motion
- Enlarged, bony or out-of-joint appearance at the base of your thumb