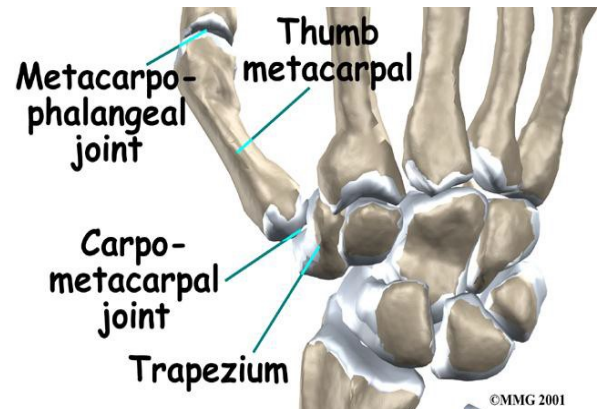




Thumb Arthritis

What is thumb arthritis?

It is degeneration of the joint at the base of the thumb metacarpal. It usually is the trapezium/metacarpal joint (TMC), but can also be the joint below as well.



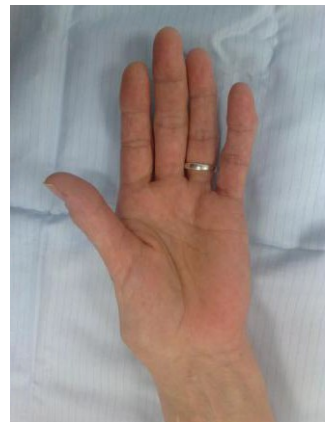
Who gets thumb arthritis?

Basal joint arthritis of the thumb is extremely common. It usually occurs in women after the age of 45, or men after the age of 60. It can be isolated or in conjunction with other hand/wrist arthritis. There is often a family history of arthritis. It is not work related, although doing any job will be hard with thumb arthritis. Rarely an old fracture can cause thumb arthritis.



What are the symptoms of thumb arthritis?

Pain at the thumb junction with the wrist upon pinching is common. Often there may be deformity of the wrist with loss of the web space between the thumb and index finger.



How do we treat thumb arthritis?

Treating thumb arthritis is about controlling pain. Thumb arthritis has usually progressed for years before anyone seeks treatment. There is no prevention or preventative treatment for arthritis. In addition, there is no benefit for early surgical intervention. Initial treatments consist of bracing and periodic steroid injections. There are no exercises that would help thumb arthritis.

When bracing and steroid injections no longer help, surgical treatment can be very successful. The decision to operate is made by the patient. The trapezium is removed and a tendon is usually placed in the space that once held the trapezium. The deformity is usually corrected at the time of surgery. If a patient has a significant “Z” deformity, they may require a fusion of the joint above the surgery. This is uncommon.



After surgery, patients are seen every two weeks. They will usually go through a progression of smaller splints and increasing range of motion.



At six weeks normal activities are allowed. Grip strength can take longer to return to normal. Supervised hand therapy may be required for optimal function. Decisions on hand therapy are made post operatively based on how well the hand and wrist are moving.

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