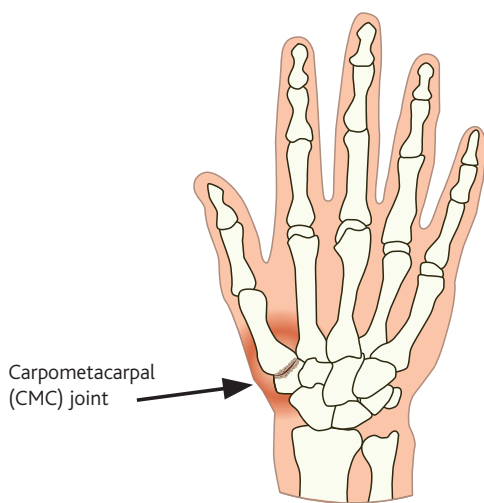




CONDITION

# What is Thumb base arthritis?

*This is a form of osteoarthritis between the base of the thumb metacarpal and one of the small bones of the wrist, the trapezium.*



## What is arthritis of the base of the thumb?

This is a form of osteoarthritis between the base of the thumb metacarpal and one of the small bones of the wrist, the trapezium. A joint is where two bones meet to allow movement.

This joint is very specialised and allows a large range of thumb motion which contributes significantly to the dexterity of the hand. As a result arthritis in this joint is often functionally very disabling.

Thumb arthritis occurs when the cartilage in the carpometacarpal (CMC) joint (see illustration) wears away.

The cartilage (the smooth lining of a joint) gradually thins and roughens. The bone underneath the cartilage starts to thicken and bony surfaces at the edge of the joints may start to grow outwards (known as 'spurs'). The joint may also become swollen and change shape.

## Base of Thumb Arthritis Symptoms

This condition affects women ten times more commonly than men. Symptoms usually start in the middle forties but can occur earlier. Initially intermittent pain is noted after gripping or pinching. This may gradually become more constant over time with associated loss of movement and strength. It becomes hard to turn keys, open jars or turn on taps. In severe cases a bump at the base of the thumb appears and the thumb becomes stiff making it difficult to pick up larger objects.

## Base of Thumb Arthritis Treatment

Most patients with this condition do not need surgery and can manage their symptoms with pain relief, exercise, heat or ice and splints. Techniques such as activity modification, joint protection and pacing will also help you protect your joints, relieve symptoms, and may slow the progression of osteoarthritis and improve your grip.

## Splints

Splints can support the thumb joints during activities that are painful, or resting splints that may be used at night.

Some splints are made of soft materials (e.g. neoprene), others can be custom made for you in a thermoplastic material which sets hard.

Alternatively in some situations they may be an off-the-shelf more rigid splint. Your therapist will choose your splint according to your individual needs.

## Joint Protection

It's important that you are aware of which activities cause you thumb pain so that you know when to wear your splints or to adapt the way you carry out this task.

Pain can be a warning that the way you are completing this task, or the length of time that you are doing the task could be causing damage to the joint.

Try the following:

- Spread the load over several joints (e.g. carrying plates/books with two flat hands rather than by gripping with your thumb).
- Use a larger stronger joint when possible (e.g. carrying a bag on your forearm or using a rucksack rather than straining your thumb).
- Use less effort (e.g. push/slide saucepans across work surfaces rather than lifting/carrying).
- Use less force by using assistive or labour-saving devices when possible and do ask for help.