

# Hand Osteoarthritis

A GUIDE FOR PEOPLE WITH HAND OSTEOARTHRITIS

**Effective Date:** September 15, 2008

## What happens when osteoarthritis is in the hand?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a disease of the cartilage. Without healthy cartilage, pressure is put on bones. Ligaments across joints may stretch. The finger joints may have periodic, painful swollen cysts. Eventually bone spurs or nodes grow around the joint and it may become crooked and stiff. OA in the hand usually affects the two sets of joints that are closest to the fingertips. The base of the thumb, near the wrist, is a common place for OA. Wrist OA may occur after injuries to the wrist.

## Common features of hand OA are:

- finger joints get bigger, these are nodes or bone spurs;
- pain or aching at rest or when holding things;
- stiffness in the fingertips causing difficulty making a fist; and
- stiffness of the thumb so it is difficult to hold a large glass or bottle.

## What can I do about Hand Osteoarthritis?

Learn as much as you can about OA. Read *A Guide for People Living with Osteoarthritis* including the list of places to get more information.

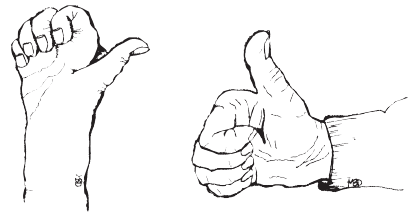
- Exercise your hands to stretch tight joints and to keep the cartilage healthy. Exercising in warm water may help stiffness and pain.
- Protect joints by using jar openers, key holders and large handled tools. Avoid extreme or prolonged positions and repetitive activities.
- Consider splints for your thumb or wrist.
- **Try the exercises on the back of this page. Start gently. Increase slowly.** If they don't help, or if they increase pain, ask your doctor about a Certified Hand Therapist, Occupational Therapist (OT) or Physiotherapist (PT). These specialists will assess you, teach you a personal exercise program and give advice about joint protection.
- If exercise causes more joint pain for over 2 hours, do less next time.

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**Hold stretches for 20 seconds. Repeat 2 – 3 times. (daily)**

**1. Stretch your fingers**

Gently curl the tips of your fingers down to touch the base of each finger, then the middle of the palm then open to the straight position. Do this in a sink of warm water.



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**2. Stretch your thumb**

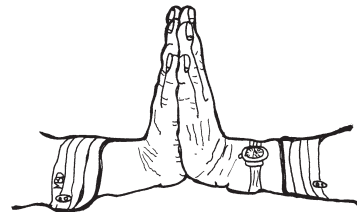
Touch the tip of your thumb to the tip of each finger, making a circle (not a “D”). Open your hand completely after each touch.



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**3. Stretch your wrist**

Put your palms together with your fingertips near your chin. Slowly lower your hands towards your waist, by moving your elbows apart. Keep your palms together to stretch the wrist. Watch yourself in a mirror to see if both hands are equal.



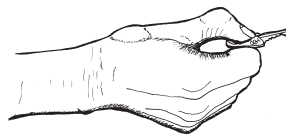
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**Protect your joints**

A good, stable thumb position



An unstable thumb position to avoid



A good thumb splint



It's good to use large handles

