

NHS Forth Valley



Arthritis of the Hand

Patient Information Leaflet



What is it?

Osteoarthritis is a disease of cartilage seen in weight bearing joints such as hips and knees. It also affects the joints of the fingers and the base of the thumbs. It is a condition of the whole joint and is probably a result of the joint trying to repair itself. There can be soft tissue swelling and bony enlargement around the joints. This can result in pain and loss of grip strength, which impacts on many daily activities.

People can go through a phase where the joints are painful followed by one where the pain eases off. Finger nodules (lumps or bumps) can be tender and very uncomfortable for a few months then the discomfort settles down. How painful a joint feels bears little relationship to the amount of joint damage. Severe pain does not necessarily mean severe damage.

What can I do to help?

If your joints ache and feel stiff, try making gentle movements in warm water or under a warmed wheat/ gel bag until they ease off.

If your joints are hot and swollen, try applying a cold pack wrapped in a damp tea towel for 10 minutes. Take any painkillers or anti inflammatory medicines as prescribed by your doctor.

Follow the hand exercise programme in this leaflet. It is designed to keep your hands as flexible and strong as possible.

Avoid repeatedly over-using the affected joints. For example avoid repeated heavy lifting.

Look out for products which reduce the strain on your hands. Examples include using a battery scwdriver or electric tin opener.

Exercises for arthritis of the hand

Recent research suggests that hand exercises can significantly improve activity performance, grip strength, pain and fatigue. The most effective exercise programmes include exercises to improve both the flexibility and the strength of the hand.

These five exercises are designed to improve the range of movement of your fingers and thumb and the strength of your grip. Over time this should make everyday tasks easier to perform and reduce your pain levels.

Remember: joints need to be moving regularly to keep them healthy. Resting joints too much allows the muscles to weaken and the joints to get more and more stiff.

Exercise programme

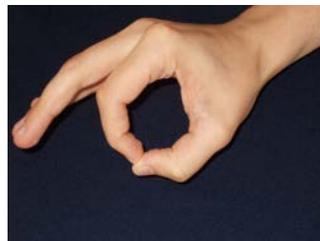
Before starting, warm up your hands by rubbing them with hand cream.

Make an 'O' sign

In this exercise, the two outer thumb joints should always be slightly bent.

Start by opening your hand as if you are trying to grab a bottle. Then pinch your index finger against your thumb keeping a round 'O'shape.

Open your hand again before repeating the action to touch your thumb to all the other fingers in turn.



Roll into a fist

Start with your hand and wrist straight.

Bend the end two joints of all your fingers to make a hook shape. Then bend all your joints to make a fist, keeping the thumb outside.

Hold for 5 seconds then slowly uncurl the finger joints back to the starting position.



Grip strengthening

Squeeze a rubber ball as hard as you can. Hold the grip for 5 seconds, then slowly relax your grip.

Start with a soft foam ball or a rolled up sock, when this becomes easy, move on to a firmer ball.



Thumb strengthening

Put an elastic band round your fingers and thumb as shown.

Place your hand palm down in a loosely clenched fist. Move the thumb out to the side, keeping the thumb slightly bent as you move. Hold this position for 5 seconds, then slowly return your thumb to the start position.



Finger stretching

Rest your palm and forearm on a flat surface, place your other hand over your wrist to keep it steady.

Spread your fingers and thumb out as far as they will go. Hold this position for 5 seconds then move your fingers back together again.

Aim to complete the full session of five exercises at least three times a week.

*Hennig T, Haehre L, Hornburg VT, et al Ann Rheum Dis 2014; 1-8
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On the first two weeks, do **10** repetitions of each exercise.

On weeks three and four, do **12** repetitions of each exercise

From week five onwards, do **15** repetitions of each exercise.

If you experience joint pain lasting more than 2 hours after exercising, you have tried too hard. Next time reduce the force of your grip to a level that does not induce pain and slowly increase from there.

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If you can't go let us know!

Every month around 2,000 people across Forth Valley fail to turn up for hospital appointments. This costs the NHS millions of pounds each year and increases waiting times.

So if you are unable to attend, or no longer require your hospital appointment, please let us know so we can offer it to someone else.

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