

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Hand Pain Treatment, Prevention

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

Arthritis of the hand causes the patient great frustration and is one of the most common things I treat. As pain, stiffness and weakness progress, it makes simple tasks like buttoning a shirt or tying a shoe difficult. It can take much longer to do things and is embarrassing and causes frustration. Other tasks such as unscrewing a jar lid or a bottle cap or picking up a small object can be almost impossible for a patient with arthritis of the hand.

The small joints in our hands produce movements that allow us to do countless activities. The human hand is a unique instrument. With proper training some of us play the violin, piano, assemble a wristwatch or *even do surgery*. I can't do any of the first three, but I can do the last one! Did you know that the word surgery comes from a Greek word, which means hand work?

When the joint surfaces that allow the fingers to move smoothly become worn, arthritis results. The bones begin to rub together and you know what that means. *Pain, swelling, stiffness.*

To adjust, the body produces more synovial fluid and the joint lining swells. Swollen joints restrict motion. The body tries to overcome this by creating new areas of bone, which become bone spurs or osteophytes. This doesn't help much because the joint further enlarges causing more pain and restricted motion. Favorite joints affected are small joints near the nails, knuckles and the base of the thumb.

Hand pain occurs after gripping or grasping. Strength is lost. Resting the hand may relieve symptoms. Diagnosis of the cause is made by examination and regular x-rays.

You usually can't work through hand pain. The pain and symptoms get worse.

What is a person to do? Is it hopeless?

The key is to figure out ways to reduce stress on the joints of the hand that are wearing out. Find different ways to do the same tasks.

Carry items with open palms. Less stress on arthritic fingers.

Open heavy doors by pushing against them with your shoulder or hip.

Thick handled pens can improve writing.

Twist jar lids with the heel of hand and not your fingers.

Buy large grip utensils.

Keep moving.

While resting your hands is good, resting them too much can increase stiffness. It's important to keep them moving. Gentle exercises are important to maintaining motion. Try doing exercises in the shower or tub because warm water makes stiff joints more pliable and easier to move.

This seems to be a good place to stop. More next week on treating arthritis of the hand.

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Website, Your Orthopaedic Connection, Archive of all previous Argus articles.
Please check it out. Be well.

Dr. Haverbush