

Arthritis in the Hand and Wrist

Arthritis is a group of conditions that cause inflammation in and around the joints. The hands and wrists are commonly affected by arthritis, whether it is post-traumatic, degenerative or inflammatory in nature. Arthritis in the hand and wrist causes pain, stiffness, deformities and loss of function. The hand and wrist have multiple small joints that work together to allow you to grip the smallest of items. Joints are affected by arthritis often make daily tasks difficult.

Symptoms of arthritis may include:

- Warm, swollen, stiff joints
- Painful joints
- Reduced grip or function in the hand
- Deformities of the fingers or hands
- Reduced sensation in the hands

CAUSES OF ARTHRITIS

There are various different kinds of arthritis, but the ones which affect the hands and wrists most commonly are rheumatoid, osteoarthritis and psoriatic arthritis.

Rheumatoid arthritis – this is an inflammatory disease which affects the entire body, causing irritation of the membranes surrounding joints and tendons eventually resulting in bone erosion and joint deformity. While rheumatoid arthritis affects the entire body, in 80% of cases, the hands are affected.

Osteoarthritis – this type of arthritis is known as a degenerative disease in which the joint surfaces become damaged over time, as we age.

Psoriatic arthritis – this type of arthritis causes the lining of the joint to become inflamed, causing the joint to become loose or crooked.

Contact us



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Operation & Rehabilitation Information

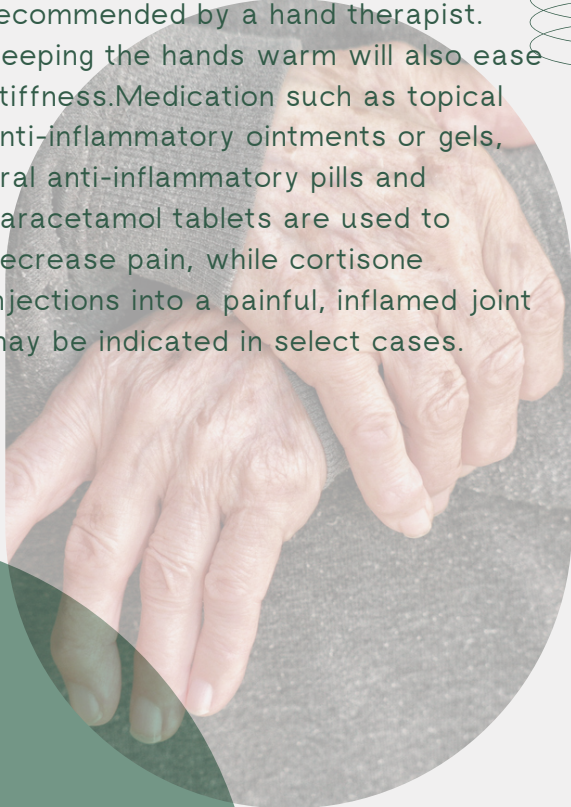


arthritis

CMC & OTHER JOINT REPLACEMENTS
AND FUSIONS

HOW IS ARTHRITIS TREATED?

For inflammatory arthritis like rheumatoid arthritis and gout, medical treatment by a rheumatologist aims to keep the disease under control. For osteo-arthritis, there is no medical treatment to control the disease, and the aim is to maintain pain-free function. An anti-inflammatory diet, supplements and lifestyle modifications can lessen pain and stiffness, while activity adaptations, assistive devices and splints or braces can be recommended by a hand therapist. Keeping the hands warm will also ease stiffness. Medication such as topical anti-inflammatory ointments or gels, oral anti-inflammatory pills and paracetamol tablets are used to decrease pain, while cortisone injections into a painful, inflamed joint may be indicated in select cases.



SURGERY OF THE ARTHRITIC HAND



Surgery becomes necessary once pain-free function cannot be achieved with the previously mentioned methods. A variety of operations are available, ranging from cleaning the joint out, denervation, replacement (arthroplasty), reconstructing the joint or fusion (arthrodesis). The best choice or combination of procedures needs to be decided on an individual basis between the patient and surgeon, considering the X-ray picture, extent of involvement and functional requirements. It is often necessary and helpful to address more than one joint or finger at the same time, but surgery to both hands at once is very rarely advised. Most operations are performed as day cases, and regional anaesthetic techniques are utilized to minimize post-operative pain.

POST-OPERATIVE CARE & REHABILITATION

After surgery, the operated hand or digit must be kept **clean and dry**. Swelling and tenderness may occur, for which **elevating** the hand will be useful. The **dressings** must remain in place until your first post-op visit with the therapist or surgeon, at which stage a custom-made **splint** will be applied and **hand therapy** will commence.

Numbness and tingling may occur while the sensation returns, but pain can be controlled effectively by taking **pain medication** before the local anaesthetic or nerve block wears off completely. **Return to function** will be guided by the therapist, with the focus on achieving independence as soon as possible.

