

# How to care for your thumb base osteoarthritis

## What is thumb base osteoarthritis?

The thumb gives humans an amazing ability to use tools and create our world. The thumb base joint is a small joint that we put under a lot of force. It has two shallow, saddle-shaped bone ends shaped like a rider on a saddle.

The shallow, saddle-shaped bone ends of the thumb base joint.



This allows for great movement, which is good when the joint is healthy but a problem if the joint surfaces are not well aligned. Poor alignment means more force through a smaller area, with excess stress and strain on the joint.

**Osteoarthritis** describes the injury to ligaments, cartilage and bone that occur when stress and strain are more than the joint can handle. This creates inflammation and pain. Recovery is limited by repeated stress and strain and other factors such as age.

## What can I do to lessen stress and strain at my thumb base joint?

1. Use your thumb in ways that keep the joint surfaces in the best possible place - use your thumb in a "C" position, where the joint surfaces are in most contact. In doing things, keep your thumb more out to the side. More contact area means less force. Use your finger to grip rather than your thumb.



2. Increase the size and "grip" of the handle of tools or equipment you use, for example a pen or kitchen knife.
3. Use two hands instead of one or use bigger joints such as your elbow or shoulder.
4. Take mini breaks to let your joint recover, but don't stop using your hand.
5. Use gadgets to make the job easier in your kitchen, at work, at your computer, in your garden, or caring for children and others. E.g. non-slip mat to open a jar or use



different containers instead of a jar. Spring-loaded scissors, tap turner,

slip-on pegs, or hand-shaped computer



mouse may ease everyday activities. More gadgets can be found at kitchen or hardware stores, at specialist shops, or online.

For online resources go to

[www.otago.ac.nz/thumb-base-oa](http://www.otago.ac.nz/thumb-base-oa)

## 6. What about the pain?

Pain interferes with how the muscles work to support your joint. Less pain is better. Try gentle heat or cold. Take your pain relief as prescribed.

**Perform Exercises 2 times Daily for 5 Minutes** - the exercises should not be painful.

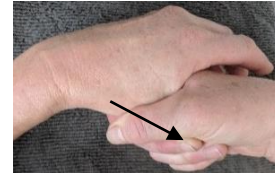
**1. Massage** your thumb webspace using your other thumb webspace, 30 seconds



**2. Gently pull** the length of your thumb away from your hand for 5 seconds, then relax.

**Repeat 2 times**

Pull



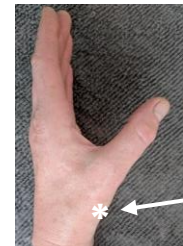
**3. Gently stretch** your thumb out to the side – grasp the base of your thumb and stretch your fingers back. Hold 5 seconds, then relax.

**Repeat 2 times**



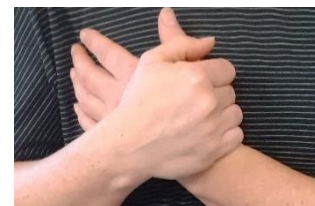
**4. Teach the muscles:** Spread your thumb out to the side as if grasping a large jar – keep your thumb long and curved like the arch of a bridge. Hold 3 seconds, then relax back.

**Repeat 10 times**



Use these muscles

**5. Butterfly stretch:** Place your sore hand on your chest, reach over with your other hand and grasp the base of your thumb. Gently stretch back, hold 5 seconds, then relax. **Repeat 2 times**



**6. Touch your thumb to your index and then your middle finger**, spread your thumb out in between each movement.

**Repeat 5 times**



**General exercise** for example walking or in the pool is recommended for your general health and for reducing the impact of osteoarthritis in any joint. Exercise should be comfortable. Do little bits often, e.g. 10-20 minutes twice daily.



**RECORD THE ADVICE YOU FOLLOW AND HOW MANY EXERCISES YOU DO AND WHEN IN THE DIARY**