

Understanding Arthritis of the Hand

Anatomy

The hand contains a complex arrangement of joints, bones and cartilage. A joint is formed at any point where two bones meet. In a healthy joint, articular cartilage coats the end of the bones and a thick liquid called synovial fluid lubricates the joint. This allows for smooth movement in the normal range of motion.

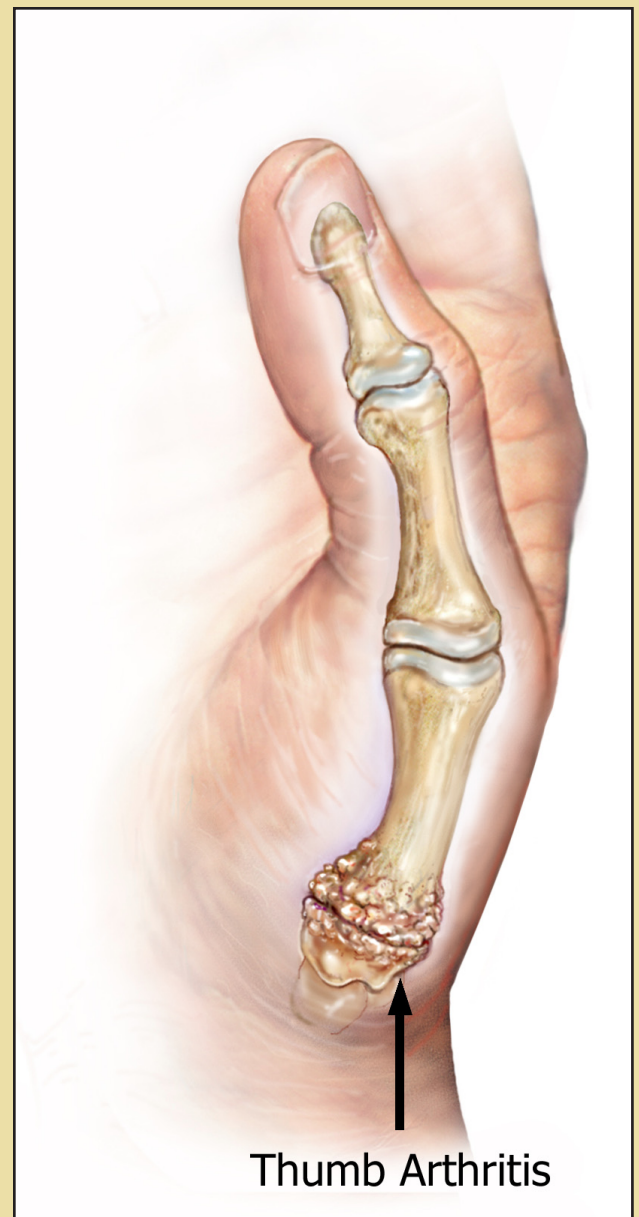
In the arthritic joint, the articular cartilage has worn away and the joint surface has become rough and irregular. This prevents the joint from moving in the appropriate manner. As the cartilage wears down, bone on bone rubbing occurs. This results in further wearing of the joint surface, increased pain and bone spurs. Arthritis can occur in any of the joints of the hand and wrist, but is most often seen in the fingers and at the base of the thumb. It can be caused by many factors including prior traumatic injury, genetics and some diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis.

Symptoms

Arthritis of the hand can result in pain, swelling in the affected joints, and the sensation of clicking and grinding within the joint. Range of motion, pinch and grip strength can all be affected as a result of arthritis. In severe cases, bony nodules will develop around the affected joints and the pain may cause waking at night.

Diagnosis

A thorough physical exam and x-rays are crucial to diagnosing arthritis. X-rays show the bony anatomy of the hand and the severity of the arthritis. In conjunction with the physical exam, this information helps your Hand Surgeon determine the extent of your arthritis.



CLINIC LOCATIONS

Columbia Heights
Eagan
Forest Lake
Downtown St. Paul
Hastings
Maplewood
Vadnais Heights
Woodbury - Allina
Woodwinds
Health Campus

CONTACT INFORMATION

Main Line
(651) 842-5200

Appointment Line
(651) 842-5201

Online at:
summitortho.com

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Treatment

While there is no cure for arthritis, there are multiple treatment options that can reduce the severity of your symptoms. For early stage arthritis, hand therapy and anti-inflammatories can be effective treatment. In more advanced cases, the following can be effective at relieving your symptoms:

Activity Modification: Patients with arthritis typically have to undergo some lifestyle modifications. Avoidance of aggravating activities can sometimes provide relief.

Braces: Your physician may prescribe a brace for you to wear during activity. These braces can be either rigid or soft and provide support to the affected joint. For some, this provides enough symptomatic relief to allow them to use their hands again.

Steroid Injections: A steroid injection allows your doctor to place anti-inflammatory medication directly inside the joint. This can result in dramatic and potentially long-term relief of pain and swelling. If this does provide relief, you may be eligible for repeat injections done every four months without any harmful effects.

If other treatments have failed, surgery may be the best option. Common surgical procedures include joint reconstruction, bone fusion or realignment. The type of procedure performed will be based upon the degree and location of your arthritis. Together with your doctor, you will decide on the most appropriate course of action for you and your lifestyle.

For additional educational materials regarding this topic please visit our website, www.summitortho.com and click on the "Patient Education" quick link.

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