

Personal exercise program

Musculo-skeletal and Pelvic health physiotherapy services
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Training start date 23/01/2025

Thumb (Carpometacarpal) Osteoarthritis

What is it?

Carpometacarpal osteoarthritis is a condition where there are changes to the joint where the thumb attaches into your hand, which often occur with age. These changes can include a thinning of the cartilage and roughening of the bones. Sometimes this will be summarised as "wear and tear" of the joint, but it can be better understood as "wear and repair" as some of the changes that occur are part of your bodies healing response.

What causes it?

It is unclear what exactly causes osteoarthritis to start in joints. In the majority of cases it is unlikely that this occurs due to how you have used the joint. It is believed that there could be a genetic cause of arthritis for many people, however this has not yet been proven.

Because osteoarthritis causes pain in the joint it will often cause a change in how the muscles that surround the joint function. If the muscles surrounding the joint weaken it will cause excess force to be put through the joint structure which can cause further changes.

What are the treatment options?

The first option to try is to complete the below home exercise program and advice. Achieving more movement and re-strengthening around the joint can often cause a marked improvement in your symptoms.

Non - steroid anti-inflammatory gels (a topical NSAIDs) can be used to relieve pain and reduce inflammation.



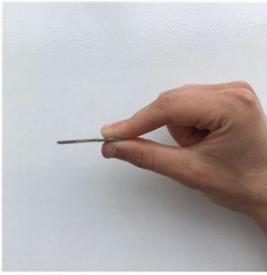
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Thumb splints and braces can provide relief whilst doing certain activities. These can be found online by searching "thumb support splint" and are often available in pharmacies also.

Make sure that you are not wearing the splint all day, as this can cause the thumb to lose some of its natural strength.

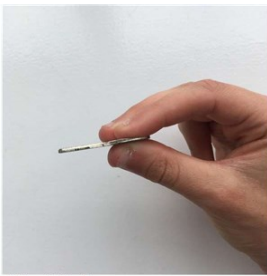
Advice

Changing how you grip small items can help to protect the joint.



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Try to avoid pinching items between your thumb and index finger. Grasping items in this way put the most stress through your thumb joint which can cause pain.



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Instead use a "tripod" type grip grasping with the thumb, index and middle finger.

Think in which ways you can change your activities so that you are putting less strain through the thumb. For example:

- Supporting a mug of tea with two hands
- When carrying large items, "hug" them close to your body
- Think "shift not lift". For example you can slide a jug of water to the kettle and only use as much as you need rather than fill the kettle at the tap.

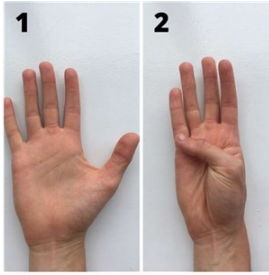
Exercises to Increase Movement

These exercises below will increase the movement of your thumb joint.

If your movement is restricted you are more likely to be using the thumb in a way that is causing increased stress through the joint.

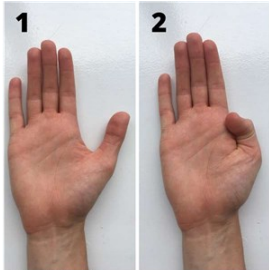
Complete 3 repetitions of these exercises at least 3 days a week (you can complete them up to once a day).

Hold each stretch for 10 seconds each time, at the point of tightness. (However do not force the movement).



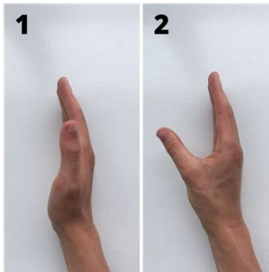
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- 1) Hand on table, palm facing up
- 2) Touch the bottom of your little finger with your thumb.



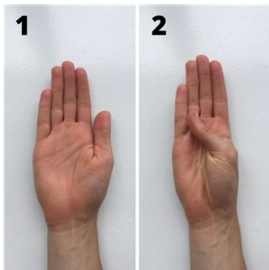
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- 1) Hand on table, palm facing up
- 2) Bend just the joint at the top of your thumb.



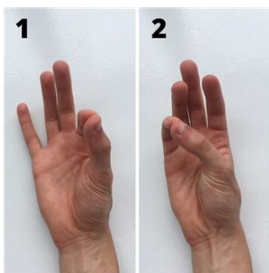
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- 1) Start with your little finger on a table and the thumb resting on your index finger.
- 2) Spread the thumb as far away from the palm as possible in the same line as the index finger.



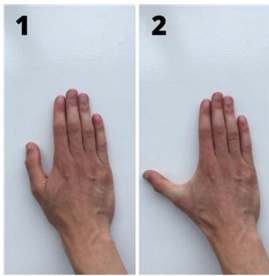
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- 1) Hand on table, palm facing up
- 2) Keep the thumb straight as you bring it across your hand (bend only the joint at the base of the thumb).



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- Touch the tip of each finger.



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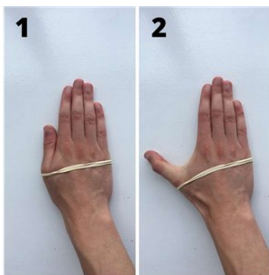
With your palm facing down bring your thumb out to the side as far as you can.

Exercises to Increase Strength

Perform these strengthening exercises 2 or 3 times a week (you need at least 48 hours rest after each time that you do them).

Complete 10 to 15 repetitions of each exercise.

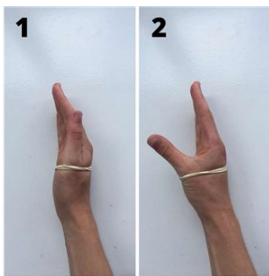
These exercises should be pain free. If you are experiencing pain during these exercises consider adapting them so that you are strengthening the thumb without moving it. To do this start in the positions marked No.1 in the two exercises below and resist your thumb with your other hand. Push against your hand without allowing the thumb to actually move. Push for 5 seconds each time and then relax again.



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1) Start with an elastic band wrapped around your hand so that it is just below the second joint of your thumb, and your hand facing downwards.

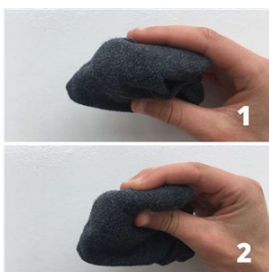
2) Bring your thumb out to the side as far as you can against the resistance of the band.



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1) Have your hand so that your little finger is resting on the table. (Keep the band in the same position as the previous exercise).

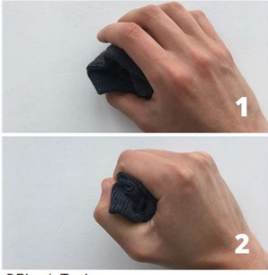
2) Move your thumb away from the rest of your fingers but don't let it come up towards your body, then slowly bring the thumb back in line again and repeat.



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1) Lightly hold a soft item in your hand. This can be strengthening putty, a hand exercise ball or simply a sock (as shown in the picture)

2) Grasp the item with your thumb and first two fingers, holding for 5 seconds before relaxing again.



Place the same soft item into your palm and grasp, making a fist. Hold for 5 seconds before relaxing again.

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You should keep on completing these exercises to keep the joint working as well as possible.
