

Osteoarthritis of the Fingers



This booklet has been designed to provide you with information about the arthritis in your finger joints. The joints affected are your Proximal Interphalangeal Joints (PIPJ) and your Distal Interphalangeal Joints (DIPJ). It also contains information about why you may experience pain, how you can manage your symptoms and what you can do to help yourself.

How Does Osteoarthritis (OA) Affect a Joint?

Osteoarthritis is a disease that affects your joint, and is associated with wear and tear. Finger joints are prone to OA because they work hard during most activities of the hand.

When OA develops in a joint the cartilage (the smooth lining of a joint) gradually thins and roughens. The bone underneath the cartilage starts to thicken and bony surfaces at the edge of the joints may start to grow outwards (known as 'spurs'). The joint may also become swollen and change shape and positioning.

What are the Symptoms?

- Pain in the PIP and DIP joint. Especially with pinching and gripping activities.
- Stiffness after rest.
- Swelling around the joint or a change in the shape of the joint may be present.
- Hand function can be impaired due to weakness and pain.

What Treatments are there?

- Try applying a heat pack, wheatbag or hot water bottle to the area, or submerge your hands in safely hot water to relieve pain.
- You can also try a cold or ice pack, or a bag of frozen peas for 10 to 20 minutes. Place a tea towel between the ice and your skin to protect from ice burns. Do not use ice if your sensation is impaired.
- Discuss appropriate medication with your pharmacist or GP. They make recommend tablets or pain relieving gels to use.

- General finger exercises and strengthening exercises are recommended, to keep the joint supple and build muscle stability around the joint (see below). This stability can help to reduce pain.
- Joint protection is a process of reducing strain on your painful joint, by changing how you do certain activities (see below).
- Pacing: don't do all heavy activities at once; spread them out over you day or week to reduce the chance of flaring up your pain. Listen to your body and if it hurts – stop.

What Exercises Can I Do?

Ideally you will do these exercises once or twice a day, and the aim is for them to be generally pain free. If you are getting some muscle ache or stretching that is ok, but if you are getting your usual joint pain or a sharp pain, you need to stop and check your technique.

Firstly, it can be helpful to start with submerging your hand in safely hot water for five minutes, to warm up and increase circulation.

Increasing Your Range of Movement

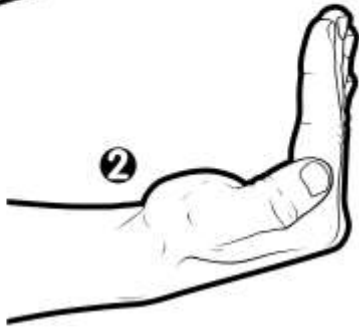
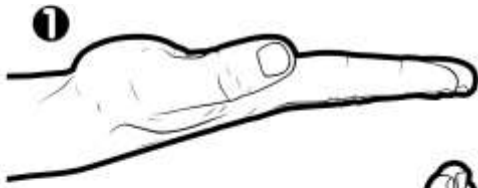
Start with 5 repetitions of each and build up to 10. You can be the judge of how often and how many exercises you do, depending on how your hand feels.



Full fist: Straighten your fingers and thumb completely, then bend into a fist and hold for 5 seconds. If your fingers do not go into a full fist you can gently help them to bend with your other hand if this feels comfortable for you.



Hook fist: Bend just the top two joints of your hand into a hook shape and hold for 5 seconds.



Knuckle bend: Start with your hand straight and then bend your knuckles and hold for 5 seconds. Keep your small finger joints straight.



Opposition (tip to tip): Slowly and gently touch the tip of your thumb to each finger, starting with the Index. Once you get to the little finger, try and slide the tip of your thumb down from the top to the base of the finger. This may be tricky.



Finger spreading: With your wrist and fingers straight, spread your fingers as wide as you can, and then squeeze them back together and hold for 5 seconds.



Finger extension: Place your hands flat, keeping your palms on the table, and then lift your fingers up towards the ceiling, and hold for 5 seconds.



Grip strength: Gently and slowly squeeze a soft exercise ball or a balled up pair of socks. Hold for 5 to 10 seconds and relax.

