

Thumb Base Arthritis

Thumb Base Arthritis is a form of osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis (OA) is the most common form of arthritis. It occurs due to wear and tear of the joint cartilage, most frequently in the hands, hips, and knees.



Learn more about Thumb Base Arthritis

What is Thumb Base Arthritis?

Thumb Base Arthritis (TBA) is degeneration of the cartilage at the base of the thumb that results in pain, weakness in pinch, stiffness, swelling and deformity of the thumb. The pain is usually related to activities that involve pinching actions with the thumb.

What roles do the joint and thumb play? Why is the thumb important in ensuring we can grip/hold objects?

Our thumb is responsible for up to 50% of hand function and is used extensively in most daily activities. The thumb provides resistance to the fingers and palm during grip and pinch.

Pinch pressures at the thumb tip are magnified approximately ten times at the thumb base. Naturally, the thumb basal joint experiences a lot of stress in daily use.

Will function of my hands be affected?

Functionally, patients may have difficulty turning door knobs and opening jars. When the cartilage covering the ends of the bones deteriorates, its smooth surface roughens. The bones then rub against each other, resulting in friction and joint damage.

The damage to the joint might result in growth of new bone along the sides of the existing bone (bone spurs), which can produce noticeable lumps on your thumb joint.

What are the risk factors?

The condition is more common in:

- Females over the age of 40
- Caucasians
- Individuals who are obese or have jobs or hobbies that require increased stress on the thumb
- Patients with a lax thumb joint or previous injury to the thumb

Can the condition be reversed or cured? Will I lose the function of my hand?

The condition is not entirely preventable as wear and tear of joint cartilage are part of ageing and daily use of our hands. In addition, it cannot be reversed as there is no way to rebuild cartilage that has worn out. However, there are many ways in which you can preserve the function of your hand.

What are the treatment options?

- Pain relief options include painkillers and splints or a brace
- Hand therapy and many adaptive devices are available to decrease the stress and pain at the base of the thumb.
- A steroid injection to the thumb base is very effective but may not be a permanent solution
- Surgery could involve removal of the arthritic joint, joint replacement, or fusion if the above fails to treat the pain.

