

Osteoarthritis of the Hand

Information for Patients



This leaflet has been written to give you the right information about osteoarthritis of the hand and what you can do to help with your recovery.

What is osteoarthritis?

Osteoarthritis is a condition that affects your joints and it is commonly misunderstood. Osteoarthritis describes the adaptive and useful changes in the way your joint looks and works in order for it to cope with the fact that it is getting older. It is not damage and is not dangerous for you or your joints.

What are the common symptoms?

Pain: Osteoarthritis of the hand can be particularly uncomfortable. In most cases, it tends to be worse with movement (particularly after a period of rest i.e., first thing in the morning).

Stiffness: With osteoarthritis of the hand, the movements of the fingers and/or thumb are often limited. Difficulty moving your hand/fingers is often because of the changes in the joint surfaces and how they work together.

Difficulty with day-to-day tasks: With the combination of soreness and/or stiffness, you can find that moving your hands during normal day-to-day tasks can be difficult. Often people will report that they struggle with tasks that require dexterity, such as writing, or that their hands get tired more quickly.

Changing shape: It is common to find that joints affected by osteoarthritis can/may change shape. Although these changes may not be pleasant to look at for some, they are not anything to worry about and again, do not mean the joint is damaged.

What can I do to help myself?

Calm it down: Often the best place to start with any painful complaint is to try and calm it down. In a lot of cases there will be things your shoulder likes to do and some things that it is less happy to do. Calming it down simply means looking at the things it doesn't like and trying to make some adjustments or changes to make it easier for yourself. For example, you might find that using your hands for long periods of time or doing strenuous tasks such as opening jars can be sore. Trying to take more breaks during a task or looking at devices

(**search: assistive devices for hands**) to help make jobs easier, can be useful whilst your hand/s are unhappy.

Keep it moving: Try to move your hands as far and as often as you can comfortably. You might not be able to do much, but anything is better than nothing.

Build it back up again: Movement is medicine for your body and your hands are no different. Calming the issue down (as described above) is often the best place to start and sometimes this might take a few weeks to help. Once your hand/s feel a little calmer, it is a good idea to start to 'build it back up again'. What this means is that once the hand/s is able to tolerate some gentle strengthening exercise, then it is worth starting some.

Will it get better?

For most people, hand pain will not be a pleasant experience but reassuringly, it does have the potential to be more manageable. By understanding the issue as best you can and by adjusting what is sore to then allow you to explore some exercise/s, is often the best formula for success.

If you would like to know more about hand pain or find a greater choice of exercises, you can explore our dedicated webpage.

Search online: [Norfolk and Waveney MSK services](#) 'hand osteoarthritis'

Exercises



Sitting: Keeping your forearm pointing up to the ceiling. Bend your wrist down and use the other hand to increase the stretch by pushing further. Follow this by pulling your wrist backwards and again, use the other hand to increase the stretch if needed.

Complete little and often throughout the day.



Sitting or standing. Take your thumb to the tips or the bottom of each finger.

Complete little and often throughout the day.



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