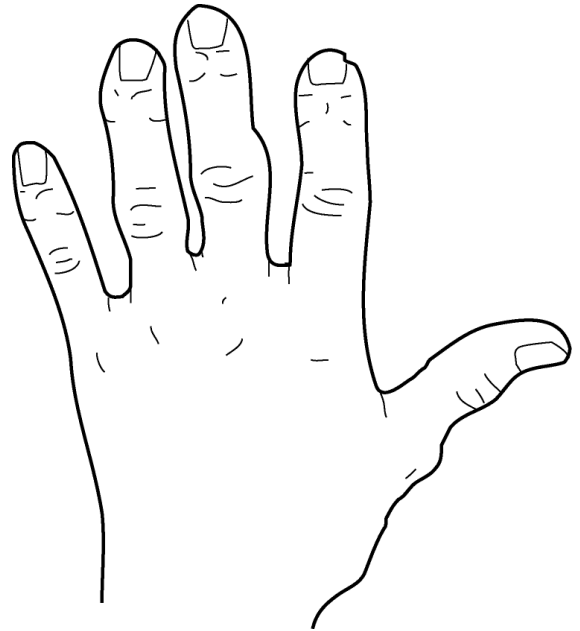


# Osteoarthritis of the Hand

Osteoarthritis is a joint disease that affects cartilage. It is the most common type of arthritis. This disease in the hand often affects the:

- Middle and top joints of the fingers
- Joint at the base of the thumb
- Wrist

Cartilage is the tissue that covers the ends of the bones and allows them to move easily. Cartilage also acts as a shock absorber. In osteoarthritis, the cartilage wears out in the joints over time from use or after an injury. The bones rub together causing pain, swelling and loss of motion of the joint.



## Signs

Signs of the disease in the hand will vary based on the joints affected. They may include:

- Aching or sore joints
- Stiffness
- Swelling
- Bony bumps called nodes may occur in the middle and end joints of the fingers

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**Learn more about your health care.**

- Loss of strength when you grip or pinch that may make it hard to turn a key or open a jar

Your doctor will check your hands and ask about your signs. X-rays of your hands may be done to check for joint damage.

## Causes

The exact cause of this disease is not known. There are factors that increase a person's chances of developing osteoarthritis. They are:

- Heredity
- Being overweight
- Joint injuries
- Joint overuse from certain jobs and sport activities

## Treatment

Your treatment plan will include ways to manage pain and improve function. This may include:

- **Exercise** to improve use of the hand or fingers and keep the joints moving.
- **Rest and joint care** to prevent pain. Splints can help protect joints and take pressure off them and may be worn during sleep or with certain activities. Your doctor or hand therapist can help you get properly fitted for a splint and show you how to use it.
- **Pain relief** using different methods. Warm towels, warm baths, paraffin baths and hot packs applied to the joints can relieve pain and stiffness. Cold packs can relieve pain or numb the area. Talk to your doctor, physical therapist or occupational therapist to find the best method of pain relief for you. Your doctor can recommend medicine to relieve pain and improve function. Corticosteroid injections can provide pain relief lasting for months.
- **Surgery** to relieve pain and improve function. You and your doctor will decide whether surgery is right for you and what type of surgery may be best. After surgery and rehabilitation, patients often have less pain and swelling and more function.

## **Living with Osteoarthritis**

Educate yourself about the disease and take part in your care:

- Learn about the disease.
- Work with your doctor to manage pain.
- Learn how to cope with arthritis to stay active.
- Know that you are not alone. Support groups can help.

For information and programs to help you manage your osteoarthritis, check out these web sites:

- The Arthritis Foundation at [www.arthritisfoundation.org](http://www.arthritisfoundation.org)
- The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases within the National Institutes of Health at [www.niams.nih.gov](http://www.niams.nih.gov)

You might also want to check your library for self-help books and brochures or magazines, like Arthritis Today.

✦ **Talk to your doctor or others on your health care team if you have questions. You may request more written information from the Library for Health Information at (614) 293-3707 or email: [health-info@osu.edu](mailto:health-info@osu.edu).**