Thumb CMC Joint Arthroplasty

Thumb arthritis may be treated with surgery if other treatments have not helped. One type of surgery is called a **thumb carpometacarpal (CMC) joint arthroplasty**. This surgery is done to relieve pain in your thumb and wrist and give you movement of the thumb. It is often done as an outpatient surgery.

**About the surgery**

The doctor will make a small cut, called an incision, at your wrist. A bone at the base of the thumb, called the trapezium, is removed. A piece of your own tendon is used to put in place of the bone to form a false thumb joint. This allows movement of the thumb and stops pain because the bones are not rubbing together.

**What to expect after surgery**

- After surgery, you will have limited use of your hand, so you need to have an adult to help you for at least the first few days.
- Your doctor will tell you when you should schedule your follow up appointment.

**Care of your incision**

- Your incision will be closed with stitches.
- You will have a bandage, ace wrap, and splint on your hand that needs to stay on and dry until your first follow-up appointment.
- Your stitches will be removed 8 to 14 days after your surgery.
- Keep the bandage clean and dry. If you want to shower, you will need to cover the bandage with a plastic bag and secure it with tape to keep the bandage dry.
- When the bandage is removed at your follow up visit, wash your hand incision gently with soap and water each day. Gently pat the incision dry with a clean towel. You can leave the incision uncovered or place a band-aid on the site. Wear your splint.
- **Do not soak your hand in water until your incision is well healed.** This means you need to stay out of hot tubs, bath tubs, or other pools of water until then. Also avoid having your hand in dirty water in a sink or tub.
Activity
• **Begin finger bending and straightening exercises right after surgery.** Your thumb will be in a splint or cast, but you will be moving all of your other fingers.
  ‣ Do these exercises 3 to 5 minutes and repeat them 3 to 5 times each day.
  ‣ Your goal is to make a full fist and to fully open your fingers.
• Use your hand to do daily activities. Avoid pinching or direct pressure on your thumb. Avoid lifting, pulling, or pushing items that weigh more than 10 pounds. A gallon of milk weighs about 8 pounds.
• Avoid activities that cause hand pain. Let pain be your guide.

Pain control
• Elevate your hand above the level of your heart after surgery. This will help to keep the swelling out of your fingers and lessen pain.
• You will be given a prescription for a narcotic pain medicine. Many patients find that over the counter anti-inflammatory medicines like Aleve, Advil, Motrin, or Tylenol are enough to control any discomfort after the first week.

Other care
• A referral to a hand therapist will be needed to have a splint made after surgery. You may or may not need more therapy. This will be discussed at your appointment.
• After your stitches are removed, begin scar massage to your incision site. If you are placed in a cast, you will need to wait until after your cast is removed to begin scar massage.
  ‣ Take a few minutes, 3 to 5 times a day, and massage your incision.

Problems to report to your doctor or nurse
• Splint or cast is rubbing or the fit is not comfortable.
• Increased pain in your hand not relieved with pain medicine.
• Signs of infection at your incision that may include:
  • Skin is red or warm to touch at the site
  • Drainage or odor at the site
  • Swelling at the site
  • Chills or fever over 100.5 degrees F or 38 degrees C

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**Talk to your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.**

For more health information, contact the Library for Health Information at **614-293-3707** or e-mail **health-info@osu.edu**.

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