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 allow 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.

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• Keep the bandage clean and dry. If you want to shower, you 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 bandaid 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 splint or cast but you will be moving all 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, then you will 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

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