ORTHOPAEDICS WA

(08) 9312 1135

BASE OF THUMB OSTEOARTHRITIS

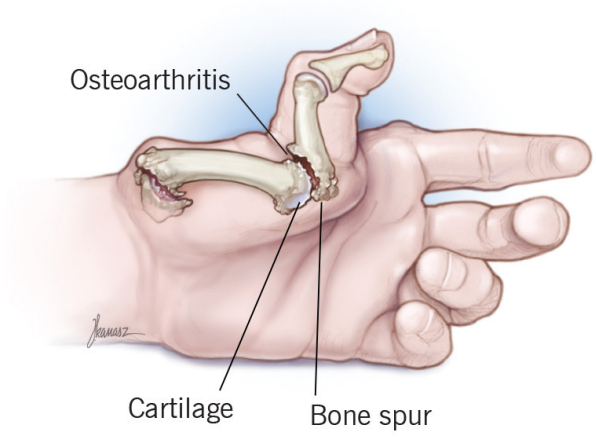
SJOG WEXFORD MEDICAL CENTRE
Suite 15, 3 Barry Marshall Parade,
Murdoch WA 6150

MURDOCH SQUARE
Suite 205, 44 Barry Marshall Parade,
Murdoch WA 6150

SJOG MT LAWLEY MEDICAL CENTRE
Suite 113, Ellesmere Road,
Mt Lawley WA 6050

WHAT IS BASE OF THUMB OSTEOARTHRITIS?

Base of thumb osteoarthritis (also known as carpometacarpal (CMC) joint arthritis) is a common condition, especially in women over the age of 50 years of age. While many people may show X-ray changes, only a small percentage experience severe symptoms requiring treatment.



Base of thumb osteoarthritis can significantly affect daily life, but with appropriate treatment—whether non-surgical or surgical—most patients can achieve pain relief and improved function.

If you have questions or concerns, consult your specialist for further guidance.

WHY DOES IT OCCUR?

This condition is primarily caused by the wearing down of the cartilage at the base of the thumb. In some cases, previous injuries or fractures may contribute to its development, but many patients have no history of trauma.

WHAT MIGHT I NOTICE?

- Pain at the base of the thumb, which may worsen with activity
- Tenderness when pressing on the joint
- Reduced grip strength
- Difficulty performing daily activities involving the thumb

DIAGNOSIS

A doctor will assess the thumb for swelling, tenderness, and reduced grip strength. A **Grind Test** (pressing the thumb along its axis) may help confirm the diagnosis. X-rays can also show signs of arthritis, including loss of joint space and bone changes.

TREATMENT OPTIONS

There are both **non-operative** and **operative** treatment options available:

NON-OPERATIVE TREATMENT

Most patients start with non-surgical treatments, which may include:

- **Splinting & Rest** - Wearing a splint to support the thumb
- **Pain Relief** - Using analgesics or anti-inflammatory medications
- **Activity Modification** - Avoiding activities that worsen pain
- **Steroid Injections** - Can provide temporary pain relief and improve function

SURGICAL TREATMENT

If non-operative treatments are not effective, surgery may be considered. The procedure typically involves:

- **Day Surgery** - Performed under general anesthesia
- **Trapeziectomy** - Removal of the trapezium bone at the base of the thumb
- **Tendon Stabilization** - A portion of a wrist tendon is used to stabilize the joint
- **Recovery** - The procedure takes about 30-40 minutes, and patients can usually go home the same day

POST-OPERATIVE CARE & RECOVERY

- Keep the hand **elevated** for the first 5 days
- Start **finger movement exercises** early to prevent stiffness
- **Splinting** for 4-6 weeks, followed by supervised exercises
- Most patients experience relief within **4-8 weeks**, but full recovery may take up to **12 months**

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

While over **95% of patients** are satisfied with the results, potential complications include:

- **Infection** (less than 1%)
- **Nerve damage** (neuroma) (less than 1%)
- **Chronic regional pain syndrom**e (1-2%)
- **Residual arthritis** in nearby joints (rare)
- **Mild long-term weakness** in the thumb

WHAT IF YOU HAVE A PROBLEM?

If you have any concerns once you are discharged from hospital you should either telephone the hospital ward, or the surgeons rooms. If they are not available you should consult your GP or local ED. Your surgeon would always want to know about any issues or complications, and would want the GP or nurse to call them to discuss the problem.

Further information is available on the OrthopaedicsWA website.