

Thumb Arthritis

Diagnosis Explanation:

Thumb arthritis (also called **carpometacarpal (CMC) arthritis**) is a **degeneration of the cartilage** in the **base of the thumb**, where the metacarpal bone meets the wrist. It commonly develops due to **aging, repetitive hand use, or previous injuries** and can significantly affect grip strength and daily activities.

Symptoms:

- **Pain, swelling, and stiffness** at the base of the thumb.
- **Weak grip strength**, making pinching and grasping objects difficult.
- **Clicking or grinding sensation** with thumb movement.
- **Thumb deformity** (in advanced cases).

Specific Work Modifications:

- **If your job involves typing or writing:** Use an **ergonomic keyboard, voice dictation software, and padded pens**.
- **If your job requires manual labor:** Avoid **forceful pinching, gripping, or repetitive hand movements**. Use **wrist/thumb braces** when necessary.
- **If your job is desk-based:** Keep hands supported, take **frequent breaks**, and use **adaptive equipment**.
- **Avoid:** Prolonged gripping, repetitive thumb use, and forceful pushing motions.

Specific Activity Modifications:

- **If you play an instrument or craft:** Use **larger-handled tools and finger splints** for support.
- **If you play sports:** Avoid **racket sports, golf, and activities requiring strong thumb grip**.
- **If you garden or cook:** Use **ergonomic tools with padded handles**.
- **Avoid:** Prolonged pinching, twisting motions, and forceful thumb use.

Recommended Supplements:

- **Collagen Peptides** - 10g daily for cartilage repair.
- **Glucosamine & Chondroitin** - 1500mg/1200mg daily for joint lubrication.
- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids** - 1000mg daily to reduce inflammation.
- **Vitamin D3 + Calcium** - 1000 IU/500mg daily for bone health.
- **Turmeric (Curcumin)** - 500-1000mg daily for natural pain relief.

Recommended Nutrition and Hydration:

- **Increase Lean Protein** (chicken, fish, tofu, eggs) to support cartilage and tendon health.
- **Eat Anti-Inflammatory Foods** (berries, leafy greens, turmeric, nuts) to reduce joint pain.
- **Consume Hydrating Foods** (cucumber, watermelon, citrus) to maintain tissue flexibility.
- **Limit Processed Foods & Sugars** to prevent inflammation.
- **Hydration:** Drink **8-10 cups of water daily** to support joint lubrication.

Home Exercise Prescription (Rehabilitation for Thumb Arthritis)

Early Phase (0-2 Weeks, Reducing Pain & Protecting the Joint):

- **Thumb Bracing** - Use a **thumb spica splint** as needed to support the joint.
- **RICE Protocol** - Rest, Ice (15-20 min, 3x/day), Compression, Elevation.
- **Thumb Stretch** - Gently pull thumb away from palm, **hold 20 seconds, 3x/day**.

Strengthening Phase (2-6 Weeks, Improving Stability & Mobility):

- **Thumb Opposition Exercise** - Touch thumb to each fingertip, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Isometric Thumb Press** - Press thumb against index finger, hold **5 seconds, repeat 10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Finger Extension (Rubber Band Exercise)** - Wrap a rubber band around fingers, open hand against resistance, **10 reps, 2x/day**.

Advanced Phase (6+ Weeks, Preventing Progression & Maintaining Strength):

- **Grip Strengthening (Soft Ball Squeeze)** - Squeeze a soft ball **5 seconds, repeat 10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Thumb Resistance Exercise** - Use a resistance band to strengthen thumb movement, **10 reps, 2x/day**.
- **Wrist Strengthening (Light Resistance Band)** - Strengthen wrist and forearm muscles, **10 reps, 2x/day**.

Helpful Books:

1. *The Hand and Wrist Pain Solution: Simple Exercises for Relief* - Dr. Ross Clifford.
2. *Arthritis and Hand Therapy: A Self-Help Guide to Managing Joint Pain* - Susan J. Barnhart, PT.

Click here for more orthopedic patient information.

Contact a Key West orthopedic clinic or reach out to Dr. Jason Pirozzolo.