

Treatment options for Basal Thumb Joint CMC Osteoarthritis (wear-and-tear arthritis at the base of the thumb)

1. **Over-the-counter pain medications:** Mild pain can be managed with intermittent use of over-the-counter pain medications. When you have a flare up of pain, or if you've overused your hand and it is painful, you can take the following medications for several days or weeks to manage the pain symptoms:

2 Extra Strength Tylenol up to 3 times per day

AND

2 Aleve twice per day **OR** 3 Ibuprofen/Advil (600 mg) up to 3 times per day

Please review the **Over-The-Counter Pain Medication** handout in this section for more detailed information on these medications

2. **Prefabricated neoprene support:**



One thumb support that many people with mild arthritic changes find helpful is the Comfort Cool neoprene thumb support. It is less expensive than custom made splints, and allows some thumb motion, so is often preferred by golfers, knitters, and others wanting to maintain as much thumb motion as possible. It can be worn during the daytime, as needed, to support the thumb and help decrease pain. It is not meant to be worn full time –for instance you may wear it 5 hours per day on a painful day, or wear it only when you do heavy grasping/pinching tasks to prevent pain, or you may not wear it at all for several weeks if the thumb is not painful. It is not comfortable to wear at night, as the neoprene support is snugly wrapped around your wrist/thumb. These are sold off the shelf at our clinic, but come in 6 sizes, so we must fit you with the proper size.

3. Custom made rigid thumb splint:



For patients with more advanced arthritic changes, or those that have need a more supportive splint (for shoveling, pushing a cart, mowing the lawn, etc), a custom made splint may be a good option. It is made with lightweight plastic that is form fit to your hand, and stabilizes the thumb in a functional, pinching position. Minimal thumb motion at the base of the thumb is possible when wearing it, but provides greater support which can better control pain in a sore thumb joint. It can also be worn at night when the thumb is painful, as it is not snug/tight like the neoprene support. It can get wet and is easily dried, but must be kept out of hot places (do not leave it in your car during the summer, as it will melt). This splint is custom made by a hand therapist in our clinic. **Please call our TCO Hand therapy Department at 952-456-7004 to schedule an appointment.**

4. **Thumb CMC joint cortisone injection:** If splinting alone is not alleviating your pain, a cortisone injection into the CMC joint can sometimes improve your pain. Results are variable; some patients notice no improvement, others report weeks or months of pain relief. 15% of patients who receive a cortisone injection report increased pain the first 24 hours, which can be treated with ice and over-the-counter pain medication. It commonly takes 1-3 days for the cortisone to take effect and reduce your pain. Patients who find cortisone injection to be helpful may have 1-2 injections per year to manage their pain.
5. **Thumb CMC joint replacement surgery:** This is an option if the other treatments are not able to control your pain. The need for surgery is determined by how you feel, not just by the appearance of your xray. Please refer to the **Basal Thumb Joint CMC Arthroplasty Surgery** handout in the **Patient Instructions** section for more information.