

PAIN & INJURY GUIDE

Thumb base arthritis: your 5-minute routine



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Gentle thumb movements of the kind hand therapists use for early arthritis at the base of the thumb.

How often: Once or twice a day. Hand therapists sometimes advise up to four times a day.

Total time: about 5 minutes. **You will need:** a table.

Before you start

- This is general information based on NHS physiotherapy leaflets. It is not a personal treatment plan. If a doctor, physiotherapist or osteopath has given you different advice, follow that.
- Move slowly and smoothly. Mild discomfort or a stretching feeling is fine. Sharp pain is not.
- The pain should settle back to your usual level within an hour or two. If it is worse the next day, do fewer repeats or a smaller movement, or leave that exercise out for a few days.

Your routine

1

Thumb out to the side

about 2 min

Rest your hand palm down. Move your thumb out to the side, as far away from your index finger as is comfortable.

How much: Hold 5 to 10 seconds, 10 repeats

2

Supported thumb stretch

about 1 min

Rest your hand and forearm palm down on a table. With your other hand, gently ease the thumb out to the side, away from the palm, starting from its base.

How much: Hold for a slow count of 10, 3 times

3

Thumb raise

about 2 min

Rest your hand on its little-finger edge with the wrist slightly bent back. Bend the tip joint of your thumb and lift the thumb up towards the ceiling, then return.

How much: Hold 5 to 10 seconds, 10 repeats

Good to know

- Some discomfort or a stretching feeling is expected. The exercises should not cause sharp or excessive pain.
- Do not move on to harder exercises unless these are easy and comfortable. Ask a hand therapist about the next stage.

Easier, or harder?

- Too sore? Do fewer repeats, make the movement smaller, or miss that exercise out for a few days.
- Feeling good? Only add a few repeats, or a second set, when the routine feels easy and comfortable. There is no rush.

Keep track

Tick a box each day you do your routine.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1							
Week 2							
Week 3							
Week 4							

Get urgent help first, and do not exercise, if you have any of these

Go to A&E or call 999 if you have any of these. They can be signs of a fracture, infection, blood clot or other emergency.

- A limb that looks deformed, or a joint that you cannot move or put weight on after an injury
- A cold, pale or numb foot or hand after injury
- A hot, red, swollen joint with a high temperature
- A painful, swollen, warm calf, with or without breathlessness or chest pain

See your GP promptly, or call NHS 111, if

- Pain after a significant injury, fall or twist
- Pain that is constant, severe or getting worse, or wakes you at night
- Unexplained weight loss, fever or feeling generally unwell with limb pain

Stop these exercises if

- If an exercise causes sharp pain, stop and speak to a hand therapist or your GP.
- If you are not improving after about 4 weeks, or things are getting worse sooner, get it checked. A GP, physiotherapist or osteopath can assess what is going on and adjust your exercises.

Want your problem assessed?

If you would like your symptoms assessed, you are welcome to book an appointment with Lance Peterson Osteopathy in Chichester: lancepetersonosteopathy.co.uk/book.html · 07899 358698. Osteopathic care is not right for everyone, and if something needs medical attention first, you will be told.

The full plain-English guide, with the common questions and sources, is at:
lancepetersonosteopathy.co.uk/guide/thumb-base-arthritis.html

Based on

The exercises are described in my own words from these NHS and Chartered Society of Physiotherapy resources. Repeats and holds are kept to the gentle, beginner end of the ranges they give. Links were checked in October 2026.

- East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust: Managing early osteoarthritis of the thumb
<https://www.esht.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/0505.pdf>