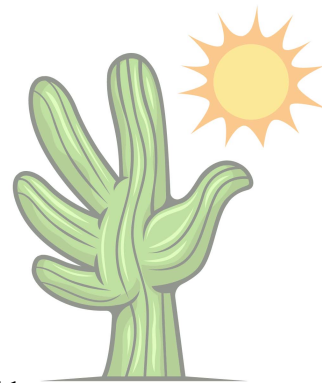


John Dunn, MD

Double Board-Certified Hand, Wrist, and Nerve Surgeon

JohnDunnMD.com

BASILAR THUMB ARTHRITIS



What is it?

- Cartilage is a smooth, ice-like substance which covers your joints so they glide smoothly.
 - o Arthritis is wear and tear on cartilage
- Basilar thumb arthritis is very common and most people notice pain and soreness with pinching or grasping.
 - o Arthritis is so common at the base of the thumb because of the irregular shape of the bone (like a horse saddle).
 - o 20 times pinch force is transmitted through this irregular-shaped bone
- Many people say they can no longer do repetitive activities (like sewing)

Who gets it?

- Affects up to 40% of the population
- Often occurs in women and may be associated with diabetes, obesity, and is frequently seen in the Caucasian population
- Often seen with carpal tunnel syndrome or trigger fingers

What can you do about it?

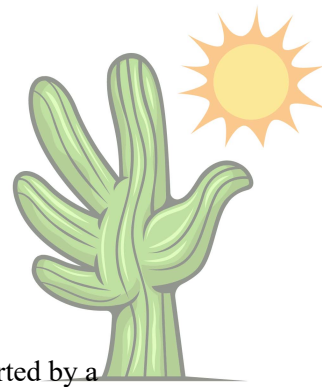
- No MRI/CT is needed – but X-Rays are necessary.
 - o X-Rays will show arthritis at the base of the thumb (red arrow)
- Brace use at night can be very helpful
- Injection will benefit most patients
 - o The injection has a small amount of numbing medicine and a small amount of steroid to decrease inflammation
 - o Some will say the thumb joint feels “full” or “stiff” for a few hours after the injection
- Surgery is (rarely) indicated when non-operative management isn't helpful



John Dunn, MD

Double Board-Certified Hand, Wrist, and Nerve Surgeon

JohnDunnMD.com



Surgery:

- The surgery involves a 4cm incision at the base of the thumb
- The thumb tendons are released, the arthritic bone is released, and the thumb is supported by a tendon transfer

Post-operative course

- Pain pills may be needed for the first 5-7 days – but most people will make a rapid recovery
- Five black nylon sutures are removed at the first post-operative visit in 2 weeks.
 - o This suture is inert (does not react with your body) and is sturdy
- The thumb is immobilized in a splint for an additional 4 weeks to let the thumb heal
- You can text, type, and do light duties with the hand before the sutures are removed while the dressing is in place (but no weight bearing)
 - o After the 4 week period, the splint is removed and you can ease back into activity
- After the sutures are removed you can ease back into activity
- Therapy may be helpful – but is not required

Outcomes

- Significant improvement in grip and pinch strength
 - o Sharp arthritic pain will be gone in most cases
- X-Rays may show that the thumb metacarpal slides down – but this is rarely noticeable clinically and does not affect outcomes

Complications

- Risk damage to neurovascular structures (including local sensory nerves), infection, and wound complications
- Sometimes the thumb knuckle may extend and affect pinching. If this happens over time, the thumb knuckle joint can be secured to put the thumb in a better position