

Hand Therapy Guide (XII)



Image source: www.apclinics.com



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This is a quick reference to guide you on referrals for common hand injuries and conditions in general practice. The theme for this issue is **Osteoarthritis of the small joints of the hand.**

Osteoarthritis of the small joints of the hand

Cause

Osteoarthritis occurs when the joint cartilage gradually deteriorates leading to inflammation.

Factors that can increase the risk of osteoarthritis are older age, genetics and joint injuries. Women are more likely to develop osteoarthritis, as well as occupations requiring repetitive stress on the joint. Lifestyle factors such as smoking can also contribute.

Symptoms

Osteoarthritis symptoms often develop slowly and worsen over time.

- Pain and tenderness of the joints
- Stiffness or loss of flexibility
- Swelling
- Weakness and/or instability
- Deformity
- Bone spurs
- Grinding sensation with range of motion

Referral

Early referral is important to help slow the progression of the disease and improve pain and joint function.

Diagnosis

X-rays or other imaging can help confirm the diagnosis of osteoarthritis however the appearance of the disease on x-ray does not always correlate to symptom severity.



Image source: researchgate.net

Management

Treatment is based on individual symptoms and presentation. Arthritis is not curable however treatment aims to alleviate symptoms, protect joints and strengthen supporting soft tissues:

- Joint protection and education
- Education regarding activity modification
- Pain management
- Custom and pre fabricated orthosis prescriptions
- Exercises to maintain joint range of motion
- Strengthening and stability exercises of 'joint friendly' muscles

Surgery might be appropriate for more severe cases of osteoarthritis for which a referral to an orthopaedic hand surgeon may be required.

Splinting



Image source: ncmedical.com and bracelab.com



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