

Gripping Pain

Finding **Relief** From **Hand and Wrist Arthritis**

Your hands perform some of the most important tasks of everyday life: tying your shoes, opening a jar and typing on the computer, among countless others. Despite how handy our hands may be, most of us probably don't give them a second thought—until, for some of us, the pain, stiffness and swelling of arthritis begin to make it difficult to carry out even the simplest tasks.

Arthritis, which affects about one in five Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control,



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can be present in any joint throughout the body; affects people of all ages, including children; and is more commonly seen in women.

The condition is caused by inflammation of the joints and the wearing down of the cartilage that normally cushions the joints. Since the hands and wrists contain numerous tiny joints, arthritis in this area can cause chronic pain, stiffness or loss of motion, as well as swelling. People with arthritis in the hands also may have difficulty with fine motor skills such as grasping, pinching and gripping.

According to the Arthritis Foundation, there are more than 100 types of arthritis and related conditions. Osteoarthritis is the most common type, developing as the protective cartilage between bones begins to wear away. Autoimmune diseases—conditions that cause inflammation when the body’s immune system begins to attack normal cells—also may lead to arthritis, including rheumatoid arthritis. People also may develop arthritis as a result of injury or environmental factors. A family history of the disease is a strong risk factor as well.

A Wide Range of Treatments

Fortunately, the hand specialists at Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital offer effective treatments, from noninvasive therapies to surgery, for patients suffering from arthritis of the hand and wrist.

“We are glad to see patients at any stage of their condition,” says Stephen Hoover, MD, an orthopedic surgeon and hand specialist at Sentara Martha Jefferson. “We don’t just expect to see patients who need surgery—we also see patients who need confirmation of their diagno-



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sis or prognosis, and evaluations of whether they’ll need surgery in the future.”

The good news, according to Dr. Hoover, is that with appropriate treatment, most patients experience improvement of arthritis symptoms.

“Our treatment of arthritis in the hand and wrist is really focused on relieving pain and maximizing function,” continues Dr. Hoover. “We can usually find a way to deal with the condition and keep our patients doing what they need and want to do.”

Front-line treatments for hand and wrist arthritis include splinting, application of heat or ice, and over-the-counter or prescription pain relievers and anti-inflammatory medications. Patients also may experience relief from cortisone or steroid injections, or from physical



or occupational therapy.

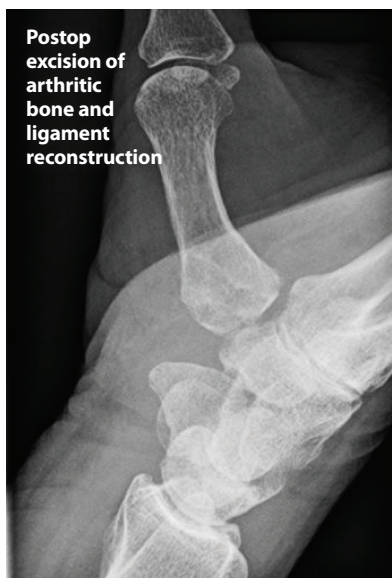
Should conservative therapies fail to bring adequate relief, Sentara Martha Jefferson's hand specialists offer a range of surgical options.

"Hand surgeries aren't as common as knee or hip replacements," says Michael Potter, MD, an orthopedic surgeon and hand specialist. "But surgical options can offer the same pain relief benefits, as well as improved function for the hands and wrists."



Finger and thumb joint replacement is one surgical option available to patients with hand arthritis. These procedures involve removal of the damaged tissue, which is replaced with silicone implants designed to help replicate natural finger movements. In some cases, a tendon graft can be transplanted from another part of the patient's body to create new joints.

Joint fusion is another option for treating arthritis in the



smaller joints of the hands and fingers. This procedure involves removing the damaged joint and fusing together the small bones in the area. While this technique results in loss of motion in the fused joints, patients usually get complete resolution of the pain in the affected area.

"Depending on the overall function of the other joints of the hand, many patients will tolerate small joint fusions very well, with little impact on hand function," Dr. Hoover explains. "The major advantage to this kind of procedure is that the patient will usually experience excellent pain relief."

Surgery also may be performed on the carpometacarpal joint at the base of the thumb. In this procedure, the surgeon removes the damaged bone from the wrist and then reconstructs some of the thumb's supporting ligaments using the patient's own tissue.

Similar joint replacement or fusion procedures may be options for treatment of debilitating arthritis in the wrist, too.



Determining the Best Way Forward

For surgical treatment candidates, Sentara Martha Jefferson's hand specialists work closely with patients to determine which procedure would be most effective. Making that decision starts with a thorough review of the patient's medical history and a complete physical exam, including X-ray imaging to identify which joints are degenerative and check out the overall alignment of the hand and wrist.

Dr. Hoover adds that it's very important for patients to articulate how arthritis limits their



daily activities, as well as what they hope to gain from surgery. All of these factors are used to assess which technique is the best option.

Joint replacement and joint fusion procedures for the hand and wrist are performed on an outpatient basis, meaning patients go home the same day. Postsurgical care includes

rehabilitation with physical and occupational therapists, who work with patients to develop strength, range of motion and flexibility in the hand and wrist joints.

“Probably the number-one reason people come for surgery is pain relief,” Dr. Hoover says. “We never guarantee that surgery will take away 100 percent of the pain, but the surgeries are fairly predictable in terms of improving pain symptoms. Patients usually gain significant relief and tend to be happy with their results.”

Advanced Training in Hand and Wrist Surgery

When deciding whether to undergo hand or wrist surgery, it’s important to choose a surgeon with the right technical expertise. The experienced hand specialists at Sentara Martha Jefferson are board-certified

orthopedic surgeons with advanced training in hand surgery, offering the latest, most effective treatments for hand and wrist arthritis.

Sentara Martha Jefferson also offers a multidisciplinary approach to relieving hand and wrist pain, with a wide range of providers available to care for patients, including musculoskeletal radiologists who are skilled in injections and nonoperative treatments, as well as occupational therapists with specialized training in hand therapy.

“We’re a tight-knit, multidisciplinary group, guided by the principles of the Caring Tradition,” Dr. Hoover says. “Our treatments are very effective, and our patients can feel confident that they’re getting the best possible care.”

When is Enough, Enough?

If you’re suffering from joint pain in your knees, hips or shoulders, Sentara Martha Jefferson Joint Replacement Center is here to help. But how do you know when it’s time to get your mobility—and your life—back?

“Joint Pain: When is Enough, Enough?” is a free seminar presented by our board-certified orthopedic surgeons, who specialize in joint replacement. Attendees will receive an overview of joint replacement and have the opportunity to ask questions about whether surgery is the right option.

To register for an upcoming event, please call 1-800-SENTARA.

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