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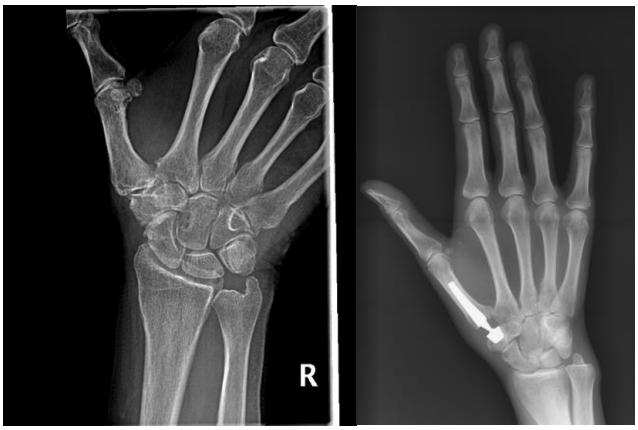
# THUMB BASE JOINT REPLACEMENT

This leaflet provides general information to help you understand joint replacement surgery for painful thumb base arthritis.

**This day-case procedure replaces the worn joint while keeping thumb movement.**

At the heart of my practice is **Shared Decision-Making**. Whether we pursue conservative management (Plan A) or surgical intervention (Plan B), the goal is to create a tailored treatment plan that aligns with your lifestyle, values, and functional goals.




*This leaflet provides general information and does not replace individual medical advice.*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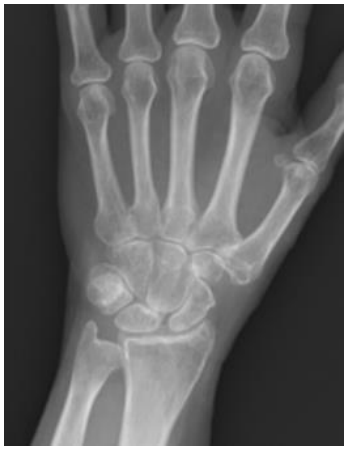
# The Anatomy of the Thumb Base

The thumb base is a mobile joint that lets you pinch and grip, relying on several structures working together:

### How the Joint Works

A saddle-shaped joint gives the thumb its range:

- The thumb bone meets the trapezium wrist bone
- It works like a 'universal joint'
- This lets the thumb swivel, pinch and grip



### The Cartilage

A smooth, slippery coating cushions the two bones so they glide over each other without friction, for pain-free movement.

### What Goes Wrong

Cartilage gradually wears away:

- The smooth surface thins over time
- The bones begin to rub together
- This causes pain, swelling and weakness
- Bone spurs and a 'bump' can develop

### As It Advances

- Pinch and grip become weaker
- A visible bump appears at the thumb base
- The thumb can take a 'zig-zag' shape
- It often coexists with other hand problems

### The Result

Everyday tasks like opening jars, turning keys and pulling zips become painful, though many people have X-ray changes with little pain.

# About the Operation

Thumb base joint replacement removes the worn joint surfaces and fits an artificial joint to relieve pain while preserving thumb movement and strength. It is a day-case operation, suited to painful thumb base arthritis that limits daily life when keeping motion is a priority.

### Why It's Done

The operation aims to:

- Relieve pain from the worn joint
- Preserve thumb movement and strength
- Restore pinch, grip and fine hand use

### The Procedure, Step by Step

The operation, step by step:

- Anaesthetic: regional or general anaesthetic
- Removal: the worn joint surfaces are removed
- Implant: an artificial joint is fitted to the prepared bones
- Closure: dissolvable stitches, dressing and a supportive splint

## Before, During & After Surgery

### Before Surgery

- Fasting: no food for 6 hours, no drinks for 2 hours before
- Smoking: avoid for at least 12 hours before, to aid healing
- Medications: continue as advised by the pre-op team

### On the Day

- Admission: check in at main reception, then to your room
- Consultation: meet your surgeon and anaesthetist
- Preparation: timing and instructions are reviewed

### Anaesthesia

- A regional or general anaesthetic is used
- Selected patients may have surgery awake with a block

## Recovery & Results

Recovery is a partnership. The timeline below is a guide — I will adapt it to your healing and your goals — **this shared decision-making process ensures you are fully informed and involved in your care.**

### Recovery Milestones

- Splint: supports the thumb for the first weeks
- Hand therapy: guided movement begins early
- Stitches: dissolvable; reviewed at about 2 weeks
- Good recovery: movement by 6 weeks, fuller by 3 months

### Results

Joint replacement gives good pain relief while keeping thumb movement and strength. Most patients return to daily tasks; implant wear or loosening is uncommon.

### After Surgery

*The first weeks*

**Dressing & Splint:** a supportive splint protects the thumb early on

**Pain Relief:** start painkillers before the block wears off and take regularly for 24–48 hours

**Hand Therapy:** guided movement begins early to restore motion

**Scar Care:** gentle scar massage with cream once healed

### Risks & Complications

*Uncommon, but possible*

**Infection:** uncommon; treated with antibiotics if it occurs

**Stiffness:** some early stiffness that improves with therapy

**Implant Wear:** wear or loosening is uncommon but can need revision

**Nerve Irritation:** temporary numbness near the scar can occur

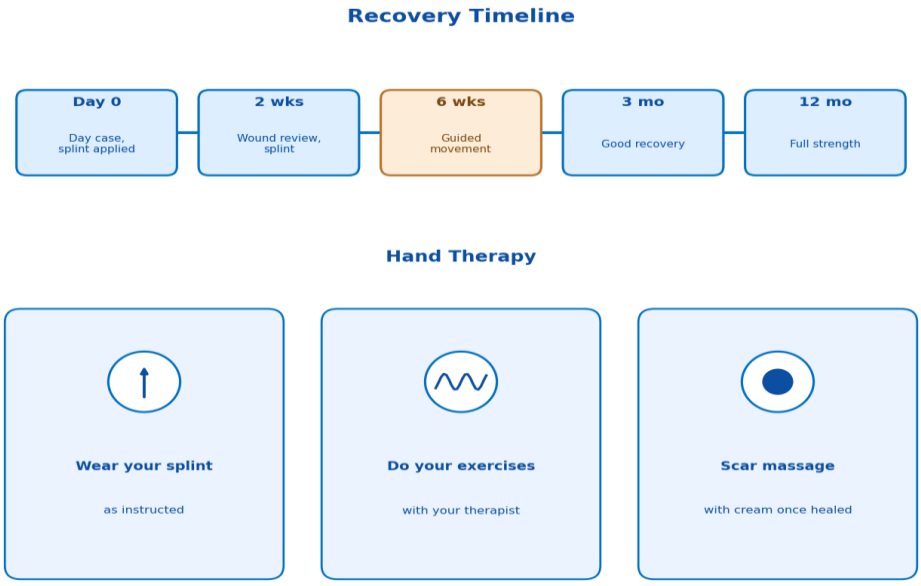
**CRPS:** rare; prolonged pain and stiffness needing therapy

## Return to Activity:

**This can be extremely variable and discuss with the surgeon. These are just guidelines.**

Desk work **2–3 weeks**; light manual work **6–8 weeks**; heavy manual work 12–16 weeks; driving once comfortable and safe for an emergency stop; movement improves with therapy over 3 months.

## Recovery Timeline & Hand Therapy




### Red Flags — When to Seek Urgent Help

Spreading redness, discharge or increasing pain, fever, or a thumb that turns pale or numb — seek urgent assessment.
If you experience any of the above, contact the practice, your GP, NHS 111, or attend your nearest Emergency Department.

### Key Points to Remember

- Replaces the joint and keeps thumb movement
- Good pain relief with preserved strength
- Hand therapy guides your recovery
- Movement improves over about 3 months

### Questions You May Wish to Ask

- When can I use my hand normally again?
- When can I drive and return to work?
- How much improvement can I expect?
- What are the signs of a problem?

### Book or Enquire Directly at Each Site

| | | |
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