



Professor Bijay Singh

Upper Limb, Trauma & Sports Medicine

FRCS (T&O), FRCS, MS, DNB, PG Dip

Visiting Professor, Canterbury Christchurch University

Visiting Professor, AIIMS Raipur

Personal • Precise • Proven • Shoulder to Finger

THUMB BASE ARTHRITIS

This leaflet provides general information to help you understand thumb base arthritis and the available treatment options.

Not everyone with thumb base arthritis needs surgery.

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.

Private Consulting Rooms

- 📍 LIPS Healthcare London
- 📍 Spire Alexandra Chatham
- 📍 Practice Plus Gillingham

Practice Manager

Kim White

☎ 07361 895875

✉ secretary@kentorthopaedicpractice.co.uk

🌐 www.kentorthopaedicpractice.co.uk



Scan to visit our website

Expert Care • Guided by Evidence • Supported by Experience • Tailored to You

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.

What Is Thumb Base Arthritis?

Thumb arthritis occurs where the thumb bone meets the wrist (the trapezium). Over time the smooth cartilage that cushions these bones wears away, and when the bones rub together it causes pain, swelling and loss of strength.

Who Gets It

Some groups are affected more:

- Women, about nine times more often than men
- Usually between the ages of 40 and 60
- Seen on X-ray in many women over 55

What Causes It?

Wear of the joint over time, made more likely by:

- Age and previous heavy hand use
- Earlier injury to the thumb base
- A family tendency to arthritis
- Repetitive pinching and gripping

Symptoms and Examination

Symptoms

- Deep aching pain at the base of the thumb
- Worse when pinching or gripping
- Weak grip, stiffness and a visible bump

Diagnosis

- Usually confirmed by examination and X-ray
- Ultrasound or MRI occasionally for other causes

Examination

- The thumb base is tender and may be swollen
- A 'grind' test can reproduce the pain
- Grip, pinch and movement assessed

Treatment Options: A Shared Decision

I will discuss all available treatment options with you, explaining the benefits and risks of each. Your preferences, values, and lifestyle will be considered as we work together to create a treatment plan best suited to your needs — **this shared decision-making process ensures you are fully informed and involved in your care.**

Treatment Depends On

- How severe the pain and cartilage loss are
- How much it limits your daily activities
- Your response to splints and injections
- Your preferences and goals

Good News

Many people improve with simple measures — pain often settles on its own over time, and doing nothing is always an option.

Plan A — Non-Surgical

Many people improve with

Activity: new ways to grip that reduce strain on the joint

Splints: a thumb splint supports the joint during heavy use

Medication: NSAID gels or tablets reduce pain

Injection: steroid or PRP can give useful pain relief

Plan B — Surgical

Considered when...

Persistent Pain: despite splints, medication and injection

Daily Life: pain and weakness limit hand function

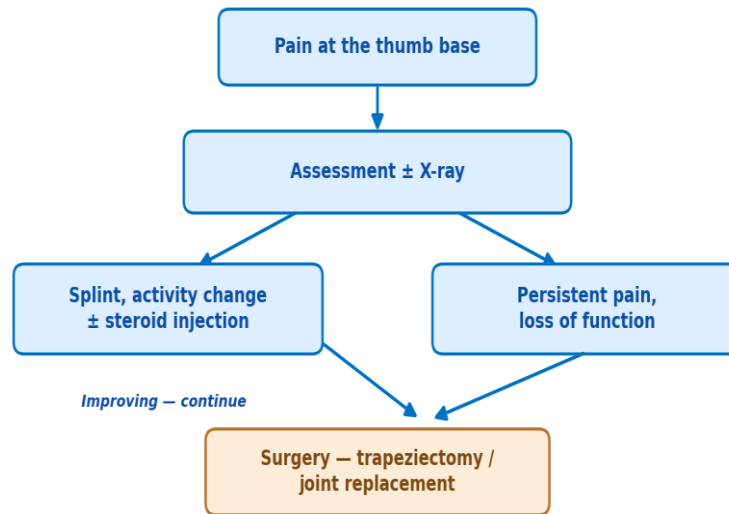
Trapeziectomy: the worn bone is removed to stop the rubbing

Replacement: an artificial joint is now a reliable option

Approach: chosen to suit your joint and your goals

The Procedure: known as **Trapeziectomy or Joint Replacement**, surgery removes or replaces the worn joint to relieve pain, usually under **anaesthetic**. A separate leaflet will be provided for the surgery.

Management Pathway



Red Flags — When to Seek Urgent Help

Rapidly worsening pain, deformity or loss of thumb function — seek assessment, as earlier treatment can protect your grip.
If you experience any of the above, contact the practice, your GP, NHS 111, or attend your nearest Emergency Department.

Important Things to Remember

- Thumb base arthritis is very common
- Many cases settle without surgery
- Splints and injections often help early on
- Doing nothing is always an option

Questions You May Wish to Ask

- What treatments should I try first?
- How long should I try them for?
- What improvement can I expect?
- What happens if I don't have surgery?

Book or Enquire Directly at Each Site

- | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|--|
| 📍 LIPS Healthcare London | ☎ 02038709996 | ✉ singh.admin@lips.org.uk |
| 📍 Spire Alexandra Chatham | ☎ 01634 662866 | ✉ alexandraselfpaypsc@spirehealthcare.com |
| 📍 Practice Plus Gillingham | ☎ 01634 969045 | ✉ Private.gillingham@practiceplusgroup.com |