



Easing the pain of arthritis

Painful joints can make your life a misery, but there are ways to ease the discomfort

Often wrongly associated with the elderly, arthritis is a common condition that causes pain and inflammation in a joint. In the UK, around 10 million people have it, and it affects all ages, including children. The two most common types of arthritis are osteoarthritis, with around eight million sufferers, and rheumatoid arthritis.

So what exactly is it? A joint is where two or more bones meet, says consultant hand surgeon, Mr Sanjay Miranda (pictured above). The ends of the bones are covered in a tissue called cartilage. Cartilage enables smooth, pain free movement due to its lubricating properties. Arthritis occurs when the cartilage becomes thin, cracked and eventually goes. The rate of deterioration varies from a few months to many decades, depending on the underlying cause. The most commonly affected hand joints are the base of the thumb and joints at the end of the fingers.

Causes

The most common cause is non-inflammatory arthritis due to osteoarthritis, which has a genetic basis and is often age-related. From age 40 onwards osteoarthritis develops in many joints including those of the hand and wrist. Injury around the joints, such as fracture or dislocation can also cause osteoarthritis. Inflammatory arthritis is associated with gout, rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis.



Osteoarthritis usually develops in the over 40s

Diagnosis

The symptoms of arthritis are pain, warmth, swelling and stiffness of joints. The hand surgeon will assess your full medical history and look at

the affected joint, limb and other areas. X-rays of the affected joint demonstrate how severe the condition is and assist in planning treatment.

Treatment

Non-surgical – Adjustment of activities and splints to support the joint during painful activities are helpful. Medication to relieve pain may be prescribed under supervision of your GP or rheumatologist.

Surgical – The three goals of surgical treatment are pain relief, improved function and appearance. Surgical treatment is most effective for pain relief and can also improve the other two.

The options for surgical treatment are joint replacement; joint fusion; joint excision (removal); placement of material within joint (synthetic or natural); or osteotomy (realignment of the joint). Many of these techniques have a good track record of success when performed by an experienced hand surgeon.

MEET THE EXPERT

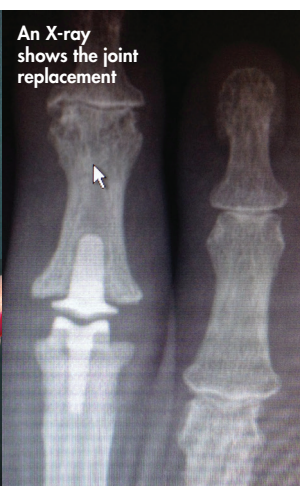
Mr Sanjay Miranda MBBS, FRCS (England), FRCS (Tr & Ortho), DipHandSurg is an accredited consultant hand surgeon working in Teesside, Northallerton, Darlington and Stockton. His orthopaedic training was in Nottingham and Birmingham. Subsequently he spent two years training in hand surgery at the world-renowned Pulvertaft Hand Centre, Derby and Royal North Shore Hospital, Sydney. He is member of the British Society for Surgery of the Hand and British Orthopaedic Association.



Wearing a splint



Straightening (above) and bending (below) the finger after a joint replacement operation



An X-ray shows the joint replacement

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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