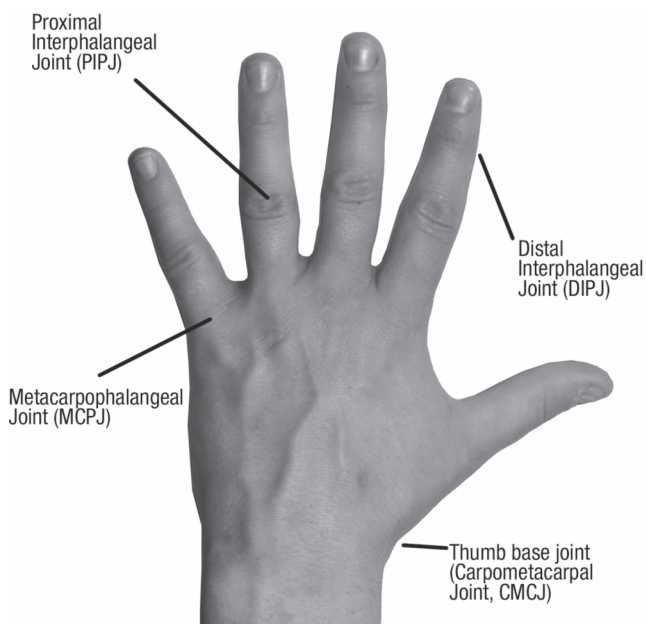




CONDITION

What is Finger Arthritis?

Osteoarthritis and inflammatory arthritis can both affect the small joints of the fingers.



Normal Hand to show different Joints and their medical names

How does arthritis affect the hand?

A common osteoarthritic pattern of joint involvement in the hand is the thumb base and some of the DIPJs. Inflammatory arthritis more commonly affects the MCPJs of both hands rather evenly. Despite this both types of arthritis can affect any of the small joints of the hand.

What are the symptoms of arthritis in the fingers?

Affected joints can be painful, swollen, mis-shapen (lumpy) and stiff. With inflammatory arthritis the supporting soft tissue structures can stretch out allowing the fingers to drift out of position from side to side.

How is the diagnosis of finger arthritis made?

A characteristic story and examination suggest the diagnosis. Xrays usually confirm the diagnosis although these can be normal early on. Blood tests and more detailed scans can sometimes be useful. Certain other conditions may need to be excluded.

What treatments are available for finger arthritis?

Most patients with this condition do not need surgery but manage with various combinations of painkillers, splints and activity modification.

If an inflammatory cause is suspected medical treatment with drugs can be very useful and this might need to be discussed with a Rheumatology Consultant.

Local anaesthetic and steroid injections into the joint can dramatically relieve symptoms, sometimes for prolonged periods. The injection doesn't repair the arthritis but does reduce the inflammation within the joint secondary to the arthritis. Sometimes the joint is more painful for a couple of days after these injections. The beneficial effects of the steroid may take up to a week to become apparent. There is also a small risk of infection with these injections.

For persistent, severe symptoms surgery might need to be considered. This must be carefully considered for each joint and each patient to balance the risks of surgery against the potential functional benefits. Persistent, intrusive pain is a common indication for surgery as well as instability causing functional difficulties. Available options include ligament reconstruction, joint re-alignment, joint fusion and joint replacement. Your surgeon can advise you further.