

# TRAPEZIECTOMY FOR BASE OF THUMB ARTHRITIS

**The problem.**

Osteoarthritis of the base of the thumb is common. It occurs with advancing age and is commoner in women. It can result in pain, stiffness and decreased function. The thumb can become painful and weak, especially on pinch grip.

**What does treatment involve?**

The diagnosis is made with a combination of history and clinical examination. X-rays are required to demonstrate the underlying joint damage. In the early stages when the disease is mild simple pain killers may be adequate. If the pain progresses it may be useful to wear splints which immobilise the base of thumb joint and prevent the bones from grinding against each other, which is the main source of pain. A steroid injection into the joint can also be given. If the pain becomes more severe then surgery to remove the Trapezium bone (Trapeziectomy) may be required. Surgery is performed under a general anaesthetic. An incision is made at the base of the thumb over the trapezium and the bone is removed. Sometimes the space left is filled with a tendon. Wires are then placed in the bones to hold the thumb still while everything settles down. These wires will be removed approximately 3-4 weeks later in the clinic. The wound is closed with non-dissolving sutures and a plaster of Paris splint is applied. The surgery takes approximately 60 minutes.

**What happens after surgery?**

You will usually be able to go home later the same day. It is very important that you keep the hand elevated to reduce swelling and pain. A local anaesthetic will have been given and will last for a few hours. You will be provided with a sling and pain killers. It is important you keep the dressing clean and dry for at least the first week and you can shower with a plastic bag over the hand. A plastic splint will be made for you by the hand therapists. You will need to wear this for 3 months, but will also be given exercises to do to improve mobility. The sutures will be removed 2 weeks following surgery. Depending on your work you will require between 6-12 weeks to recover.

**What are the advantages?**

Surgery improves the pain and hand function, but strength may not return to normal.

**What are the complications?**

Bleeding and infection is rare. Sometimes a thick scar can develop, especially if the incision has been slow to heal. A small number of patients experience pain in the scar that may take several weeks to settle down. There is a small risk of injury to the tendons, vessels and nerves, but this is very uncommon. You may experience a decrease in thumb movement and slight shortening of the thumb, although this is usually not a problem. Rarely, a condition known as Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome can develop which is treated with intensive hand therapy.