



Mr Harry Clitherow

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Orthopaedic Surgeon Upper Limb Specialist

Mr Clitherow specialises in

- Shoulder problems
- Elbow conditions
- Wrist problems
- Hand problems
- Upper Limb Nerve problems

TAC and Workcover referrals
accepted

Urgent appointments available

Consulting at

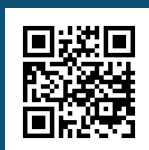
- Melbourne Shoulder and Elbow
Centre Brighton
- St John of God Hospital Berwick

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Base of Thumb Arthritis

Base of Thumb Arthritis affects the joints around the trapezium bone at the base of the thumb.

It is extremely common to see arthritic changes in this area on x-ray, however only a small proportion of patients will have symptoms.

Presentation

- More common in females than males.
 - Can affect people as young as those in their forties.
 - Pain is felt around the thenar eminence on the thumb-side of the palm.
 - Pain is aggravated by opening jars or turning door knobs.
- The patient may also have concurrent carpal tunnel syndrome symptoms.

Examination

The palm is very sore to palpate around the radial (thumb) side of the hand and wrist, usually directly over the thumb carpometacarpal (CMC) joint

In advanced cases the thumb CMC joint is very stiff and the patient is unable to open their palm.

The metacarpophalangeal (MCP) joint of the thumb may also be hyperextended.

Imaging

Plain X ray of the thumb and wrist

- This will demonstrate the thumb joints and show any other areas of arthritis that may explain the patient's pain.
- CT is rarely necessary to make the diagnosis.

Treatment

Base of thumb arthritis can usually be managed without surgery.

The arthritis is often long standing and the patient experiences an exacerbation. The aim of treatment is to allow the exacerbation to settle.

- Rule out other causes for the pain.
- Hand therapy: exercises and grip techniques to off load the thumb CMC joint.
- Thumb CMC splints: these prevent the thumb from getting into a painful position.
- Steroid injection: preferably done with radiological guidance for better accuracy and less pain.

Surgery

Patients with base of thumb arthritis that does not settle despite conservative treatment may benefit from surgery. There are a number of different procedures that can be performed, including trapeziectomy, joint replacement or fusion.

The exact choice depends upon the pattern of the arthritis and the functional demands of the patient.

After successful thumb arthritis surgery, the patient can expect to have markedly reduced pain and be able to grip objects with little or no pain. Their grip strength may be reduced.

When to Refer to a Hand Surgeon

- Base of thumb arthritis with persistent pain and dysfunction despite appropriate splinting and a steroid injection