

Stretching and strengthening exercises for the thumb

Hands Burns and Plastics Therapy

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: April 2026

Next review: April 2029

Leaflet number: 430 Version: 3

Introduction

The best position for the thumb during activities using a pinch grip is when it forms an “O” shape with the index finger. Try to keep a bend on both joints of the thumb. This reduces the stress on the joint at the base of the thumb.

Moving the thumb into this position or keeping this position when pinching can be difficult for certain conditions like arthritis.

Your therapist will choose which exercises will help with this.

Some of these exercises help to increase the flexibility of the thumb and some to increase its stability and strength.

You may have mild discomfort. These exercises should not increase your pain.



Mobility exercises

It can be common for the middle joint to get stiff.

Support the thumb at the base below the middle joint.

Bend the middle joint and straighten. It is important not to over straighten.



Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice

Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester’s Hospitals
To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

Stretching exercises

In the gap between the thumb and first finger, the muscles may get tight. Squeeze the web space between the thumb and index finger to help relax the muscle.

Use your other hand to stretch out the base of your thumb. **Hold for 20 seconds**

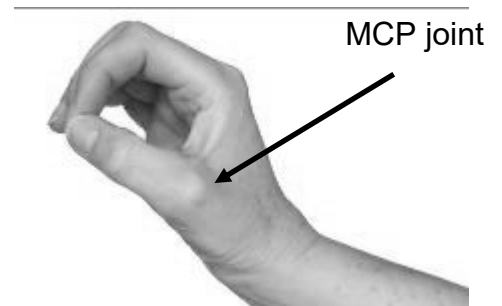


Stability exercises

1. Use your other hand to support the affected thumb. Hold the thumb in an "O" shape with the thumb touching the index finger. Make sure to keep the MCP joint bent.

Once you can manage to hold the position above you can move on to the next set of exercises:

1. Move your thumb into the "O" shape without using the other hand to help. Touch each finger in turn, keeping the MCP joint bent. Begin with the index finger then the middle finger and so on.
2. Start to add a gentle pinch force. This should be pain free. If the thumb starts to "collapse" at the joints relax and repeat.



Repeat times every day

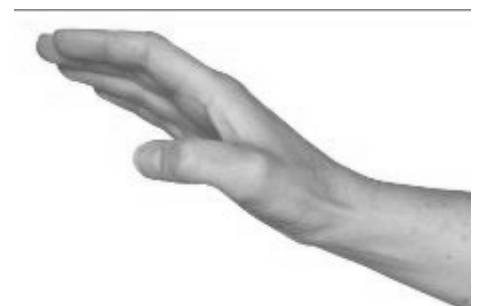
Bending the end joint

Keep the middle joint still. Bend and straighten the end joint of the thumb.

Progress this by moving the thumb away to widen the web space. Bend and straighten the end joint again.

Repeat times every day

This can be progressed by putting a rubber band below the end joint of the thumb to add resistance.



Strengthening exercises

To strengthen the muscles that move the thumb away from the palm:

1. Place a rubber band between the ring and little finger.
2. Loop it around the hand and thumb below the middle joint of the thumb.
3. Move the thumb sideways away from the palm



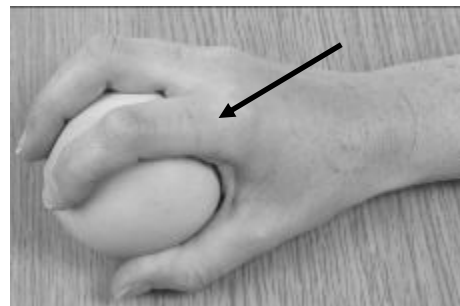
Repeat times every day

More strengthening exercises

The muscle that moves the index finger sideways is also used in helping to keep the thumb stable for pinch activities.

With your hand supported, trace the outline of a tennis ball with the index finger.

Once the muscle contracts **hold for 5 seconds.**



This muscle can be further strengthened by moving it against resistance. Try using a rubber band.

Repeat times every day





Contact details

Therapist: _____

Contact Number: _____

Make a note of any questions here:

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
على هذه المعلومات بلغةٍ أخرى، الرجاء الاتصال على رقم الهاتف الذي يظهر في الأسفل

જો તમને અન્ય ભાષામાં આ માહિતી જોઈતી હોય, તો નીચે આપેલ નંબર પર કૃપા કરી ટેલિફોન કરો

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਹੇਠਾਂ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਗਏ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਟੈਲੀਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

Aby uzyskać informacje w innym języku, proszę zadzwonić pod podany niżej numer telefonu

If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net