



FINGER JOINT ARTHRITIS

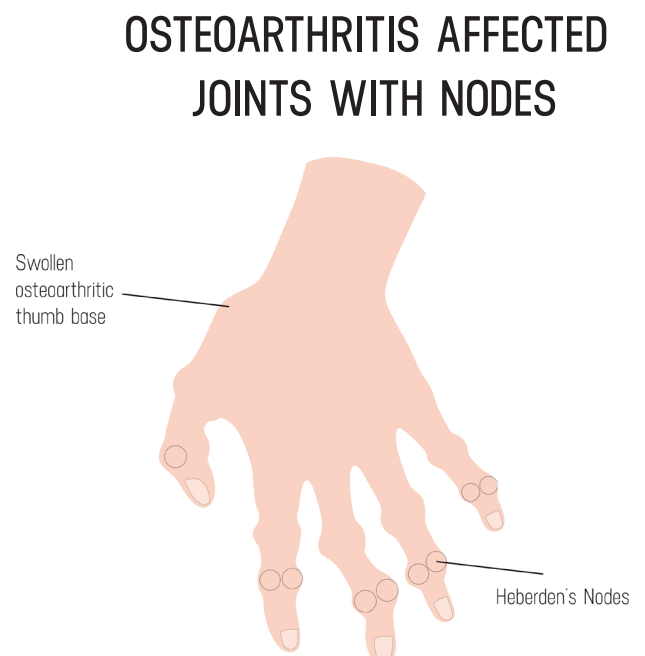
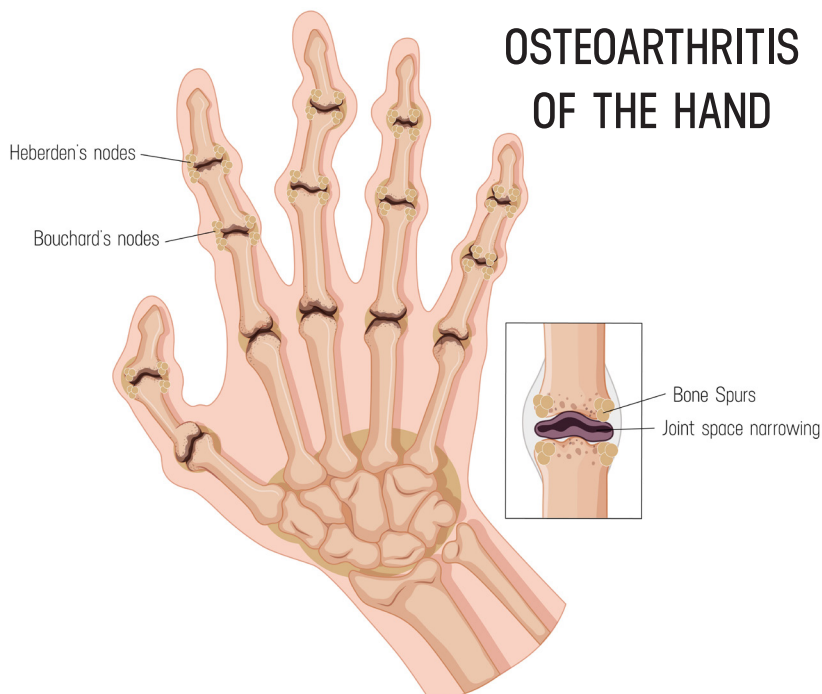
ABOUT

There are many different types of arthritis that affect the small joints in the fingers. Arthritis is commonly referred to as one disease however it is an umbrella term for many different conditions that affect a joint (where two bone ends meet). Three commonly known types of arthritis that may affect the small joints in the fingers are osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout.

Arthritis is characterised by inflammation and damage to joint cartilage that occurs on the surface of the bones where they meet. Usually, cartilage is smooth, allowing the bones to move on each other and surrounding structures with ease. When the cartilage becomes damaged, the joints become inflamed. This can result in joint pain, weakness, instability and deformities reducing an individual's ability to function and participate in daily activities.

It is commonly believed that arthritis is a natural part of ageing, however many people of any age experience arthritis. There are many factors that may increase the likelihood of developing arthritis including:

- Family history and genetics
- Lifestyle factors including diet and smoking
- Occupations, specifically those that are repetitive in nature or place excessive strain on joints
- Gender (more common in women)



SYMPTOMS

- Pain and tenderness in the joints of the fingers and hand
- Swelling or heat localised to the joints of the fingers and hand
- A feeling of stiffness in the fingers and hands
- Reduced range of motion
- Reduced strength
- Joint deformities such as small lumps, sometimes referred to as "Heberden's" (at the finger tip joint) or "Bouchard's" (at the middle finger joint) nodes.

X-rays or other medical imaging may show the presence of arthritis, however the appearance of the joint on imaging does not always correlate with symptom severity.

HOW HAND THERAPY CAN HELP

Your therapist will tailor a treatment program towards your individual symptoms, needs, goals and lifestyle. Arthritis is not curable. Treatment aims to alleviate symptoms, support and protect the joints, as well as strengthen the supporting soft tissues e.g. muscles.

Treatment may include any of the following:

- Education regarding the condition, cause and lifestyle factors that may worsen symptoms
- Education and discussion around a pain management plan and strategies, e.g. applying heat to the joints when particularly painful
- Education on work simplification strategies, joint protection principles, aids and devices for use in daily activities to reduce strain/stress on joints, prolonging their life and preventing further damage
- Custom made orthoses to promote optimal joint position for function in daily activities as well as at rest
- Gentle exercise to maintain joint mobility and soft tissue length
- Gentle strengthening exercises for the muscles in the hand to support the joints
- There are some surgical options available in severe cases of arthritis. If you have surgery you may be referred to hand therapy for appropriate rehabilitation.



*HAND THERAPY IS THE
ART AND SCIENCE OF
REHABILITATION FOR THE UPPER
LIMB - SHOULDER TO HAND*

*The Australian Hand Therapy
Association provides support
for its members through
continuing education, professional
development, networking and
representation at
state and national levels.*

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