

## Exercises for base of thumb arthritis

### Other formats

If you need this leaflet in another format such as Braille, large print, high contrast, British Sign Language or translated into another language, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service:

- 01392 402093 (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services)
- 01271 314090 (for North Devon services)
- [rduh.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals@nhs.net)

### Introduction

Strengthening of certain muscles around the thumb has been shown to improve symptoms for people with arthritis in this joint.

Building strength around the thumb supports the joint better and reduces your thumb adopting positions which in the long term can worsen the pain you experience.

We advise you do exercises once a day, up to 10 repetitions of each.

Before each session of doing the exercises, it is good practice to do the warm up, which is outlined below.

After the warm up, start with level one and when you can consistently work through all of these exercises easily and comfortably, we recommend you progress onto the next level.


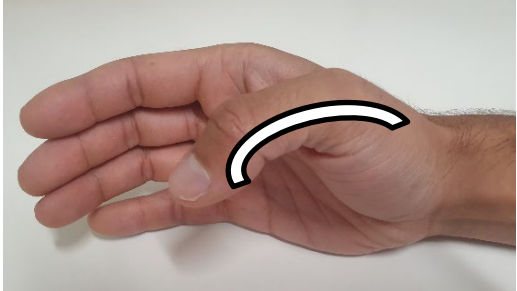

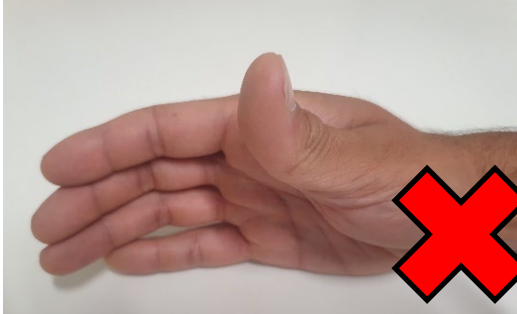

It is not unusual to experience slight discomfort or pain in your thumb after doing these exercises. If it goes above a three out of 10 pain or does not settle within 30 minutes of doing the exercise, you should reduce the number of repetitions of each exercise to a manageable level and then slowly build up to 10.

### Warm up




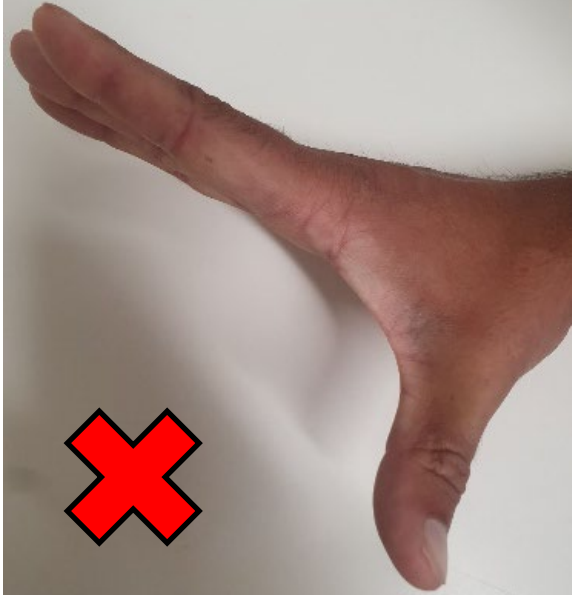
- Place your hand in a bowl or sink of warm water
- Gently stretch your fingers and thumb out wide, hold for a second and then make a fist, now repeat for a minute
- Move your thumb in a circular motion for one minute and then reverse the direction (clockwise and then anti-clockwise)
- Repeat for up to five minutes

## Level one exercises


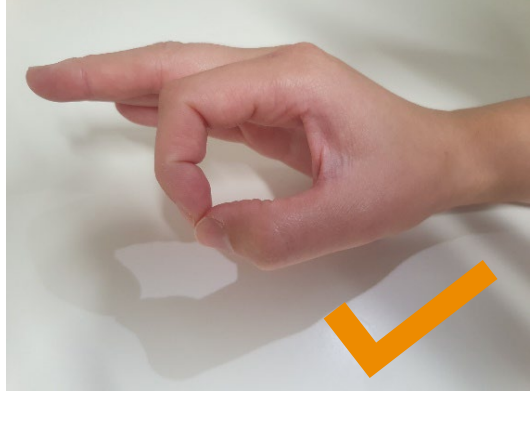
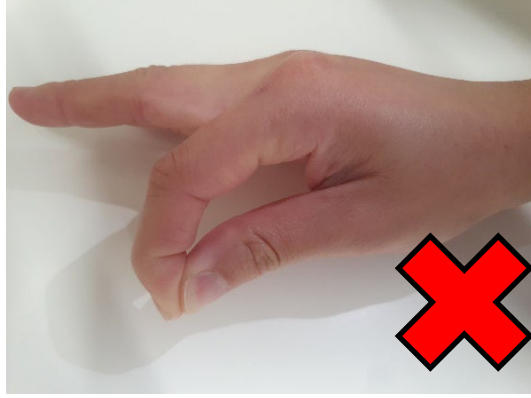
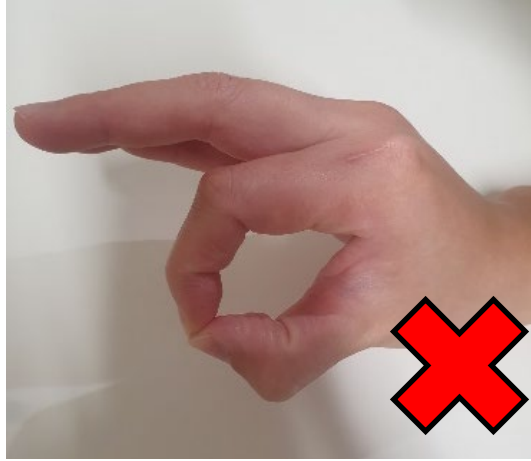
### Level one: exercise one

	<p><b>Step one</b></p> <p>Rest your hand in front of you on your lap or a table, with your wrist straight or bent slightly back.</p>
	<p><b>Step two</b></p> <p>Keep an eye on the posture of your thumb as you move and keep the top two joints slightly bent so your thumb makes a 'C' shape</p>
	<p><b>Step three</b></p> <p>While keeping the tip of your thumb bent in the "C" shape position, try and lift the bottom knuckle of your thumb as high as you can while maintaining the C shape.</p> <p>Hold for 5-10 seconds and then slowly lower your thumb. Repeat up to 10 times.</p>
	<p>Incorrect position</p> <p>Try not to overextend the thumb. This is not the right way to do this exercise.</p>
	<p>If you are unable to get your thumb into this position, you can try and use your other hand to gently lift the bottom knuckle of your thumb so that it is slightly raised and flexed. Then try and maintain your thumb in this position while you take your other hand away.</p>

**Level one: exercise two**

	<p><b>Step one</b></p> <p>Rest your hand in front of you on your lap or a table, with your wrist straight or bent slightly back.</p>
	<p><b>Step two</b></p> <p>Keep an eye on the posture of your thumb as you move and keep the top two joints slightly bent so your thumb makes a 'C' shape</p>
	<p><b>Step three</b></p> <p>Now while keeping the tip of your thumb bent try and move your thumb away from your palm as far as you can while also lifting it towards the ceiling.</p> <p>Hold for five-10 seconds and then slowly lower your thumb. Repeat up to 10 times.</p>
	<p>Incorrect position Try not to overextend the thumb. This is not the right way to do this exercise.</p>

**Level one: exercise three**

	<p><b>Step one</b></p> <p>Rest your hand in front of you on your lap or a table, with your wrist straight or bent slightly back.</p>
	<p><b>Step two</b></p> <p>Slowly tap your index finger with your thumb to form an 'O' shape, while keeping your thumb joints slightly bent (flexed).</p> <p>Don't put much pressure through this pinch, the aim is to get to this position while keeping your thumb in a bent position.</p> <p>Hold for five-10 seconds and then slowly lower your thumb. Repeat up to 10 times.</p>
	<p>Incorrect position</p> <p>Remember to bend the joints of the thumb to form the 'O' shape.</p>
	<p>Incorrect position Try to bend the bottom joint of the thumb outwards (not inwards) to form the 'O' shape.</p>

## Level two exercises


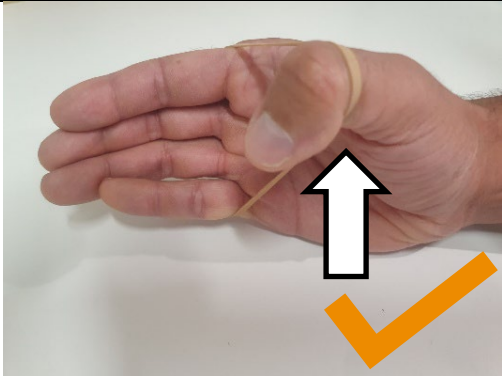
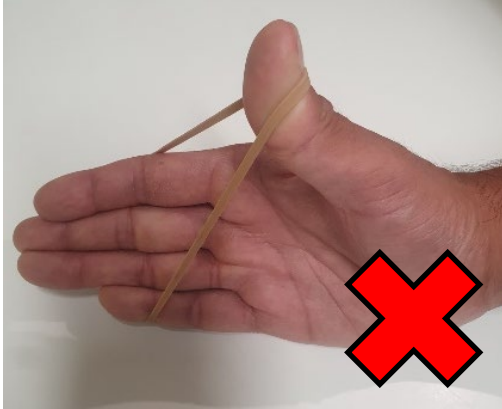
**Important:** remember to only progress to this next level once you are able to consistently work through all of the level one exercises (listed above) easily and comfortably.

First carry out the warm-up exercise (outlined on page one), gently moving your hand in warm water.

Perform these level two exercises with the strongest rubber band that you can **comfortably** stretch around your thumb and fingers.

When you can perform this exercise **easily**, change to a stronger band.

### Level two: exercise one

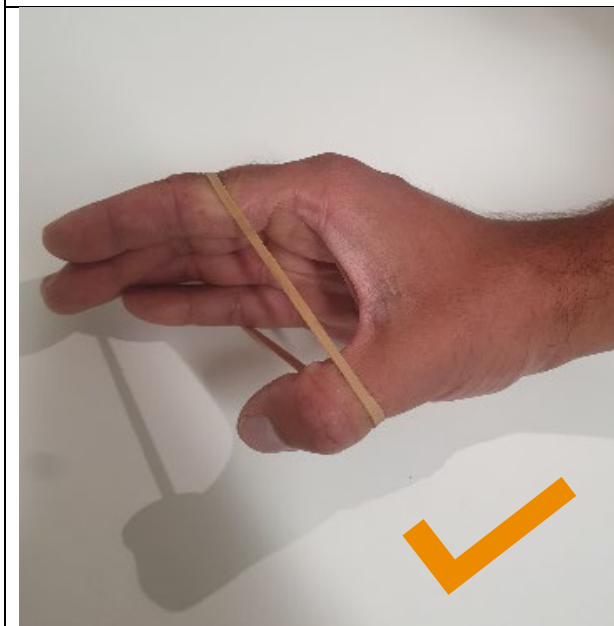
	<p><b>Step one</b></p> <p>Start with your hand relaxed and a rubber band placed around your hand crossing around your thumb as in the picture on the left.</p>
	<p><b>Step two</b></p> <p>Stretch the band slowly by lifting the thumb upwards as far as possible while keeping the two joints of the thumb slightly bent.</p> <p>Hold for five seconds then lower slowly.</p> <p>Repeat up to 10 times.</p>
	<p>Incorrect position Try not to bend the thumb joints back or bring the wrist forward.</p>

**Level two: exercise two**



**Step one**

Start with your hand relaxed and a rubber band placed around your hand crossing around your thumb as in the picture on the left.

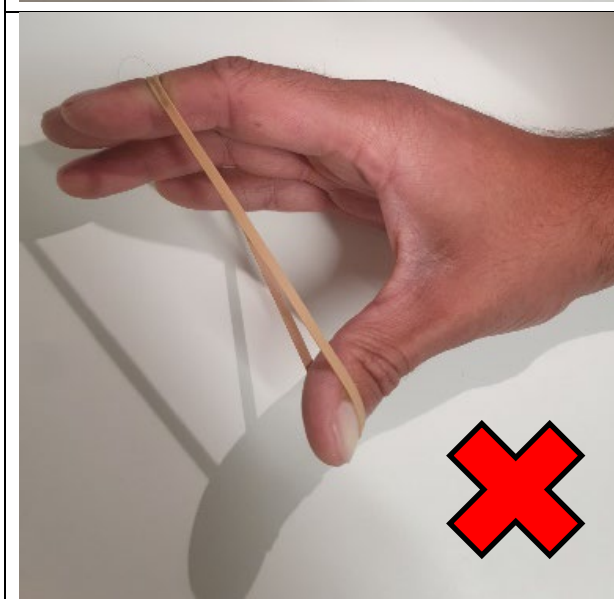


**Step two**

Keep the top joints of the thumb bent and lift your thumb up and out towards your opposite shoulder while keeping the thumb as far away from the palm as possible (as if reaching around a glass).

Relax the thumb back to the start position (step one) by slowly lowering the thumb while keeping both thumb joints a little bent.

Repeat up to 10 times.



Incorrect position Try not to bend the thumb joints back or bring the wrist forward.

## Level three exercises

Only when you can easily do level two exercises then you can go straight from the warm-up to level three exercises.

Practice tasks where you use your thumb to pinch, (but try to start with activities that use low force) for example, writing, holding a key, tearing sheets of paper.

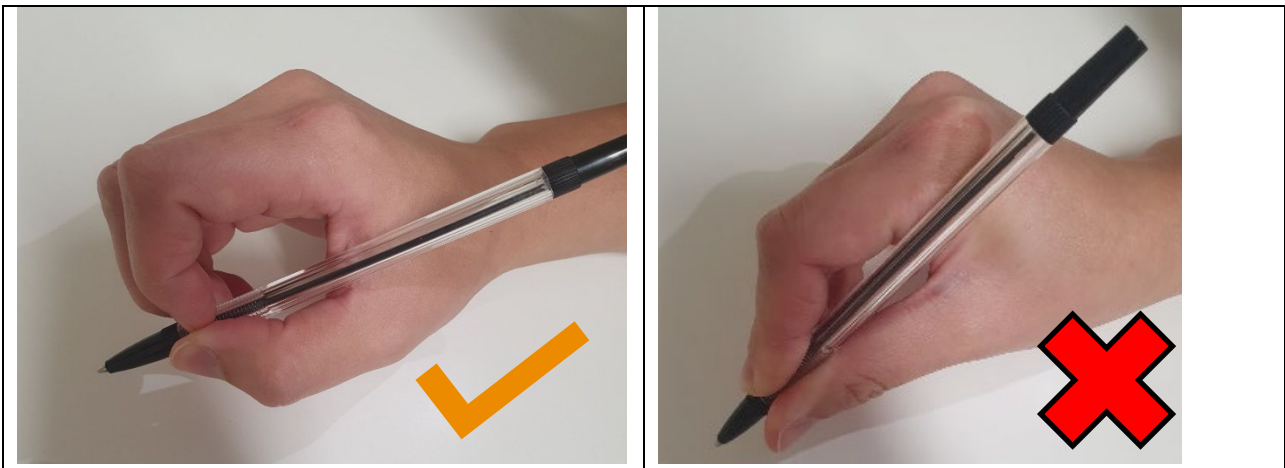
When you do these tasks, the focus is on your thumb posture. Continue to keep both joints of the thumb slightly bent, and the wrist slightly extended.

Take time to look at your thumb and try to keep your thumb joints in a slightly flexed position. Try not to let them bend backwards.

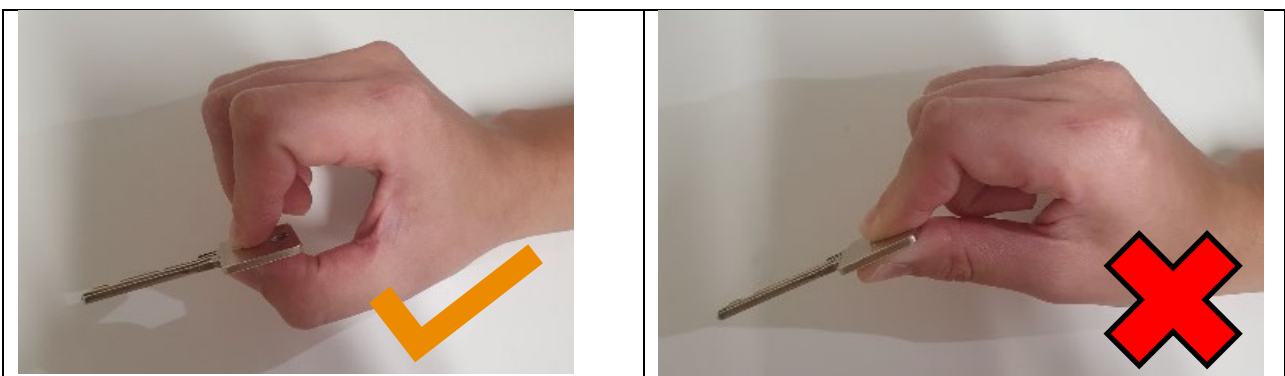
Stretch your hand and fingers out between the tasks.

The following pictures show the correct and the incorrect way to do various pinch tasks:

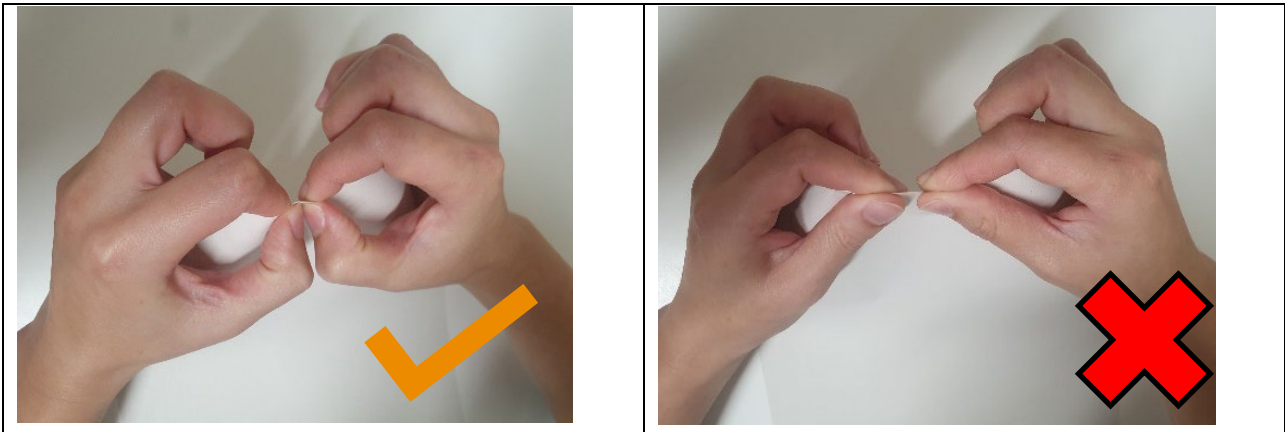
1. Practice writing e.g. your name and address using the correct thumb position as shown below. Repeat this up to five times.



2. Practice turning a key as if unlocking a door using the correct thumb position as shown below. Repeat up to 10 times.



3. Practice tearing a piece of paper in half using the correct thumb position as shown below. Repeat up to 10 times.



The final progression is to use this thumb position during functional tasks that involve tighter pinching or twisting (like screwing a nut on a bolt, opening a bottle or jar, twisting a key in a lock or turning on a tap).

## Your notes

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## PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) ensures that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, answers questions and resolves concerns as quickly as possible. If you have a query or concern, please contact PALS:

- 01392 402093 (for Mid Devon, East Devon and Exeter services)
- 01271 314090 (for North Devon services)
- [rduh.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rduh.pals@nhs.net)

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