

# Osteoarthritis (OA) of the hand

## Information for patients

This sheet provides you with information about osteoarthritis of the hand and the benefits of doing joint mobilisation and strengthening exercises to ease symptoms. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact your hand therapist.

### What is osteoarthritis?

OA is a common condition that can affect any joint in the body. It is most likely to affect weight bearing joints or joints we use a lot in everyday activities such as knees, feet and hands.

When a joint develops OA, part of the cartilage thins and the surface becomes rough. This means the joint doesn't move as smoothly as it should. When cartilage becomes worn or damaged, the body tries to repair the damage.

Sometimes the repair processes change the joint structure and can cause symptoms such as pain, stiffness, swelling, crepitus (sensation or noise when you move a joint), muscle wasting and muscle weakness.

The cause of OA is unclear. Your risk of developing OA depends on several factors including age, gender, obesity, joint injury or abnormalities, genetics, weather, diet and other joint diseases.

### Hand osteoarthritis and exercise

It is common for people with OA to worry about exercise causing further damage to your joints. However, multiple studies have found benefits of joint mobilisation and strengthening exercises for OA of the hand.

### What are the benefits of exercise?

- Reducing pain
- Maintaining functional independence
- Improving muscle strength, keeping joints strong and protected
- Reducing stiffness
- Improving energy levels

### Getting started with hand exercises

It is normal to experience some discomfort when doing exercises. This doesn't mean you're causing harm, however, seek advice if the pain is severe and doesn't ease over a few days. A safe exercise programme begins slowly and progresses gradually over time. Avoid repetitive movements of the affected joint and adapt activities within your pain threshold.

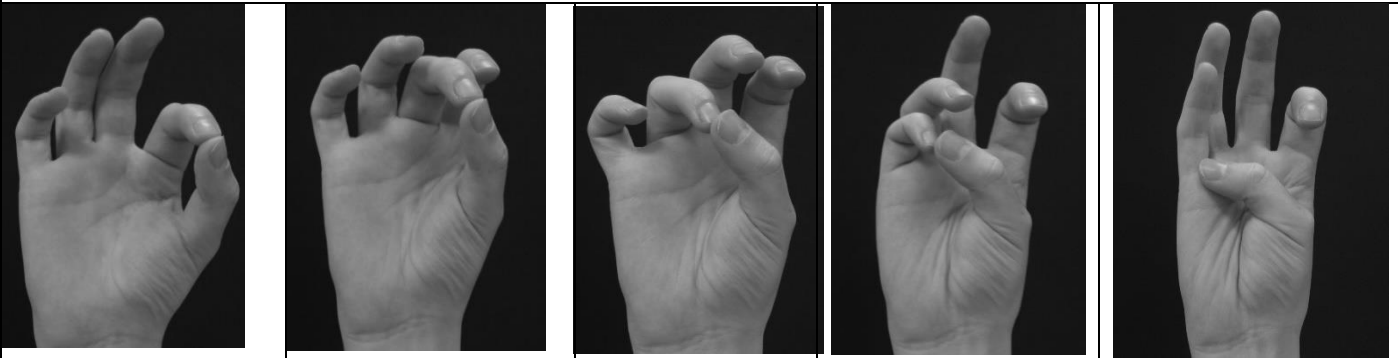
For further information please refer to the leaflet on joint protection strategies.

## Active OA hand exercises

**Tendon glides:** Make each type of fist 10 times, holding for 3 to 5 seconds. Repeat set 3 to 5 times a day.



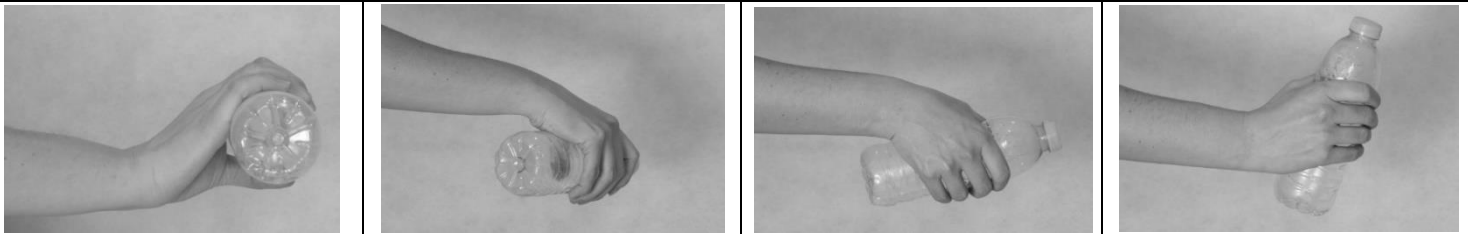
**Opposition:** Tap thumb to each finger. Repeat set 3 to 5 times a day



## Strengthening OA hand exercises

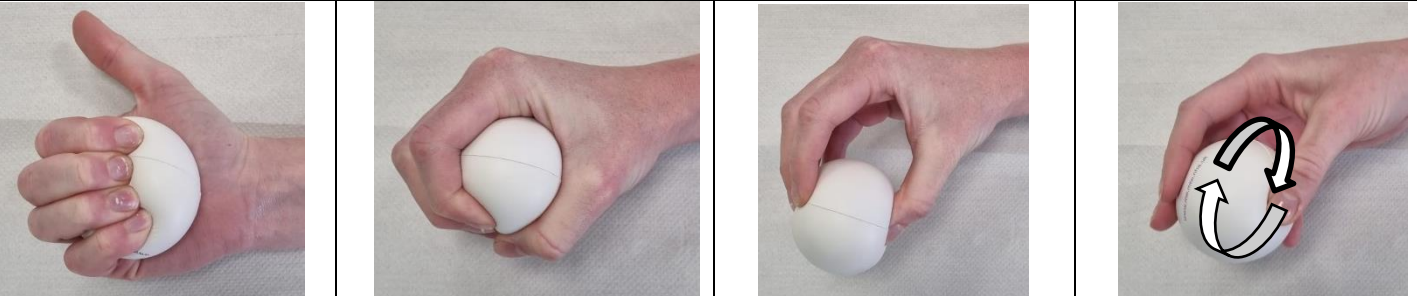
### Water bottle strengthening exercises

Start with approximately 1 inch of water in the bottle, then gradually increase this once the movement feels smooth and well controlled. Repeat each exercise 10 times. Repeat set 3 times a day.



### Finger strengthening

Use a stress ball or rolled pair of socks. Repeat each exercise 10 times, holding for 5 to 10 seconds. Repeat set 3 times a day.



Squeeze the ball with the fingers.

Put the thumb and fingers in an 'O' shape around the ball and squeeze.

Pinch between fingers and thumb, maintaining 'O' shape.

Rotate the ball using the thumb and fingers, moving away from the palm.

## Sharing your information

King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has partnered with Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust through the King's Health Partners Academic Health Sciences Centre. We are working together to give our patients the best possible care, so you might find we invite you for appointments at Guy's or St Thomas' hospitals. King's College Hospital and Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trusts share an electronic patient record system, which means information about your health record can be accessed safely and securely by health and care staff at both Trusts. For more information visit [www.kch.nhs.uk](http://www.kch.nhs.uk).

## PALS

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) is a service that offers support, information and assistance to patients, relatives and visitors. They can also provide help and advice if you have a concern or complaint that staff have not been able to resolve for you. They can also pass on praise or thanks to our teams.

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**If you would like the information in this leaflet in a different language or format, please contact our Communications and Interpreting telephone line on 020 3299 4826 or email [kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net](mailto:kch-tr.accessibility@nhs.net)**