

Expectations for Thumb CMC Osteoarthritis Surgery



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What is Thumb CMC Osteoarthritis?

Thumb CMC osteoarthritis (OA) is a condition that affects the base of the thumb where the thumb meets the wrist. This joint is known as the carpometacarpal (CMC) or basal joint. In osteoarthritis, the cartilage that cushions the bones in the joint deteriorates over time, leading to pain, swelling, and stiffness. This often makes everyday tasks like gripping, pinching, or holding objects difficult. A procedure called the LRTI is a very common and successful surgery to address thumb CMC arthritis if nonsurgical interventions have failed.

Please refer to www.handcare.org for more information about thumb CMC arthritis.

What is the LRTI Procedure?

LRTI stands for "Ligament Reconstruction and Tendon Interposition." It is a type of surgery used to treat severe thumb CMC osteoarthritis. In this surgery, the trapezium is removed, and the thumb metacarpal is stabilized by weaving a tendon through the base of the bone.

The goal of the LRTI procedure is to relieve pain and restore function to your thumb. This surgery usually provides excellent and permanent pain relief and improves the ability to use your thumb in daily activities.

What to Expect on the Day of Surgery

Anesthesia: The surgery is typically done under regional anesthesia and light sedation. This means that your arm is numbed by the anesthesiologist using a technique called a brachial plexus block. This will numb and relax the muscles of your arm from the shoulder down for several hours. You will also have sedation, which means you will sleep through the procedure. You will be breathing on your own, as intubation (inserting a tube into the throat) is not typically required for this surgery. You will not feel any pain during surgery, and it would be unusual for you to remember anything during surgery.

Your arm will remain numb for several hours, typically lasting into the evening. You should use a sling to support your arm until the numbness wears off.

Description of the Surgery

An incision is made over the base of the thumb. The trapezium bone is removed. A small incision is made on the forearm to access the tendon that is used to stabilize the thumb metacarpal. Removing this tendon does not affect the motion of the wrist or forearm.

The harvested tendon is placed into the space left by the removed trapezium and is woven through the base of the first metacarpal (the bone at the base of the thumb). This ensures proper suspension and position of the thumb.

Both incisions are closed with dissolvable sutures which do not need to be removed.



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The surgery itself takes only about 1 hour, but patients spend about half of the day at the surgery center/hospital for surgical preparation and post-operative recovery time. This procedure is done on an outpatient basis, so you will go home the same day.

What to Expect After Surgery

DRESSINGS AND SPLINTS

- Immediately After Surgery: You will have a soft cast/splint on your arm to immobilize the thumb and wrist which should be kept clean and dry and should not be removed until the first follow-up appointment.
- Please note it is normal to have swelling in your hand and fingers after surgery.
- It is very important to keep your hand elevated (wrist above the level of the heart) for the first several days after surgery which will help with both swelling and pain.
- Avoid lifting, pushing, or pulling with the affected hand.
- Please begin moving your fingers immediately after surgery to prevent stiffness and swelling.
- A sling is not mandatory after the block has worn off unless you have been specifically told otherwise.

PAIN MANAGEMENT

- Medications: You will be given pain medication to manage any discomfort. Since pain medications can cause nausea or constipation, you will also receive medications to help with these side effects.
- Ice and elevation are very helpful for controlling pain in the first few days after surgery. Please note that the ice can help with pain and swelling even if you do not feel that your wrist is feeling cold through the splint

FIRST POST-OP APPOINTMENT

After seeing your doctor and getting an x-ray, you will see hand therapy where the therapists will make you a custom removable splint and instruct you on beginning therapy exercises. Please note that our office will schedule you a therapy appointment at the same time as your first post-operative appointment, so you will receive a call from our office confirming this appointment.

RECOVERY

The pain from arthritis usually disappears immediately after surgery, though patients often have pain from the surgery for several weeks. Most patients are able to perform everyday activities (ADLs) around 6-8 weeks after the surgery, though people often feel weak and limited with the normal use of their hands until about 4 months after surgery. Motion and strength may continue to improve for up to a year from surgery.

If you have any questions or concerns about the procedure or your recovery, the most efficient way to contact us is via the messaging portal on MyChart. Dr. Bogle's team works on checking and answering these messages throughout the workday to get back with you as quickly as possible. **After hours and on weekends** (outside of 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. Monday-Friday) please call 804-379-2414 to speak with the on-call provider.