

Trouble opening jars?

AN ORTHO-PINION



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Do you have trouble opening jars or bottles? Do you feel like you just don't have grip or pinch strength in your hands anymore? Are you aching at the base of your thumb?

One of the most common hand problems as we mature is basal joint arthritis, or arthritis of the hand/wrist at the base of the thumb. The cartilage tends to wear in this joint, and we get aching or even sharp pain with use of our thumbs. We have trouble with door handles, jars, and bottles. We feel it when we crochet, garden, sail, golf—pretty much any activity!

Anti-inflammatories like ibuprofen or naproxen can be helpful, particularly if taken before aggravating activities. More recently, topical cream and gel anti-inflammatories have become available. These decrease the inflammation in joints, which decreases the pain you feel. If you have other medical conditions or are on medications, check with your doctor to make sure that these are safe for you. You will want to take them with food or milk and stop taking them if they irritate your stomach.

Splinting can be quite helpful. Thumb spica sleeves can be purchased in the first aid aisle of most drug stores or ordered online. These offer compression and support during activities and can be soothing.

Moist heat can help alleviate symptoms, and some people find relief with paraffin wax treatments. There also are aids available—such as jar openers—to help perform activities that have become too difficult.

If your pain is interfering with your lifestyle and these treatments have not worked, you might benefit from a steroid injection into the joint or, if all else fails, surgery.

Does that mean you should stop pursuing your hobbies? The short answer is, rest sometimes can alleviate inflammation and decrease pain, but it won't make the cartilage grow back again. A hand specialist can help you minimize the effect of this arthritis on your life—and lifestyle!

Learn more about [Arthritis of the Thumb\(/en/diseases--conditions/arthritis-of-the-thumb/\)](/en/diseases--conditions/arthritis-of-the-thumb/).



This Ortho-pinion was originally written for *A Nation in Motion*, the AAOS's award-winning public awareness campaign dedicated to sharing the stories of people whose lives were improved by orthopaedic surgery.

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