



When do I need a joint replacement?

Joints in the fingers and thumb wear out over time naturally resulting in osteoarthritis. This process can be accelerated following trauma. Rheumatoid arthritis is a specific condition which results in joint inflammation and degeneration. Either way, the endpoint is loss of the soft spongy cartilage which lies between the two bones of any joint and acts as a shock absorber. Without it the bones impact on each other. This is arthritis and results in pain, swelling, stiffness and deformity. Usually treatment involves non-surgical options first such as splinting, hand therapy, pain killers and steroid injections. Ultimately, when surgery is required the joint is removed and either the two bones fused together, called arthrodesis, or the joint is replaced, called arthroplasty. Which of these options is recommended depends on many factors including which joint and which finger.

What are the types of joint replacements?

Materials used for joint replacement in the hand include silicone, metal, plastic and pyrocarbon. Some are in one piece and simply act to separate and prevent the bones hitting each other. Others are in two pieces designed to reproduce the natural hinge mechanism of most hand joints. Choice of implant depends on many factors.



Silastic joint replacement

What can I expect from surgery?

This type of surgery is often done as a day procedure under very light sedation and local anaesthetic. Multiple joints can be done at the same time but usually only on the one hand. Following the surgery, you will be given very clear instructions regarding pain killers, showering and activity. Often a plaster splint is applied until your first postoperative review. In the early period following surgery you will be referred to the hand therapy department to begin your intensive rehabilitation. This may continue for some weeks or months and require multiple appointments. The aims of this surgery are to control pain and correct deformity whilst maximising motion in the affected joint.