



How does Rheumatoid Arthritis affect the hand and wrist?

Rheumatoid arthritis is an inflammation of the tissues in the joints and tendons. It can occur in any joint of the body but is very common in the hand and wrist. It is caused by a problem with the body's immune system where it attacks the tissues lining and lubricating joints and tendons. This inflammation may cause swelling of a joint or tendon, stiffness and pain and unfortunately, untreated may cause permanent tissue damage. It may involve only a single joint or multiple joints in the body. This damage may cause the tendons and joints to deform or break. It may also produce things like Carpal Tunnel Syndrome. Some patients develop rheumatoid nodules in the hand and arms. These are hard nodules under the skin that may be painful and interfere with activity.

How is it treated?

The treatment of rheumatoid arthritis is mainly with the use of drugs prescribed by your doctor or a rheumatologist. Whilst these will not cure the disease, they may alleviate symptoms and delay or prevent any tissue damage. Hand therapy is an important adjunct to the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. This therapy is used to maintain movement and strength, to protect damaged joints and uses a combination of splinting and mobilization techniques.



What surgery is involved?

Sometimes surgery is needed to correct deformities, relieve pain and restore function. This may take the form of joint replacements, or fusions to stiffen joints. Surgery may also be used to repair tendons or ligaments that have broken. Surgery also can be used to assist with the medication in controlling your disease. This will usually be to remove areas of troublesome inflammation that are not controlled by the medication. Surgery is also used to remove troublesome rheumatoid nodules. After surgery there is usually a period of therapy and splinting to protect the repaired tissues.