

# contracting fingers?

## NEW INJECTION RELIEVES DUPUYTREN'S

**Y**ou may think it's arthritis, but if your ring finger or pinkie is bending inward, and you have large, thickened nodes in your palm, you probably have Dupuytren's contracture. This disease creates a thickening of the palmar fascia — the interior tissue of the palm — causing the smaller fingers to contract.

Dupuytren's can make it hard to put on gloves, put your hands in your pockets, and do simple manual tasks. "As the contracture becomes more severe, it can become a disability," says orthopaedic surgeon Bruce Wolock, MD, whose specialty is hands.

The condition occurs more frequently in people of English, Irish, and German ancestry, and to people with diabetes, epilepsy, or a history of heavy alcohol use. Men are more likely to develop it, as are older people.

The "tablet test" helps make the diagnosis, explains Dr. Wolock: "You put your palm face down on a table, and if you cannot flatten out your fingers, it means you probably need treatment."



**BRUCE  
WOLOCK, MD**  
Hand Specialist

Treatments vary from injections to minimally invasive procedures to major surgery. Dr. Wolock carefully individualizes the approach for each patient, based on the severity of the disease and patient preferences.

deposits. There was virtually no pain," he says. He wore a soft half-cast for a week and now has full use of his hand.

There is also a mini-procedure in which the surgeon makes little needlesticks or small incisions to cut the cord a bit and relieve the contracture.

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— Bruce Wolock, MD, Orthopaedic surgeon

A new medication called Xiaflex is given by injection. It's an enzyme that dissolves the fibrous tissue of the nodes, allowing the hand to straighten out. The next day, patients return so that the doctor can use gentle pressure under local anesthesia to open the contracted fingers.

Bill Sarver, a chemical engineer, preferred this option to major surgery and was fascinated at how the enzyme works. "The enzyme breaks down the collagen

Minimally invasive techniques bring relief for about three to five years, but the condition does return and will need more treatment, which patients like Sarver don't mind.

"Surgery is the most effective and permanent solution," says Dr. Wolock. "All the diseased tissue is removed. Although it's major surgery and the initial recovery time can take four to eight weeks, it will take care of Dupuytren's forever."



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