

'Handled' With Care

Arthritis in hands treated with graft repair

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Aging hands and wear and tear can lead to painful hand arthritis.

Our hands are the most expressive and useful parts of our bodies. We take them for granted until something that limits their function causes us to fully appreciate how much we do with them.

As people age, hand arthritis becomes extremely common, explains

St. Joseph Medical Center orthopaedic surgeon Dr. Bruce Wolock. He uses the term “wear-and-tear arthritis” to describe degenerative arthritis because the smooth cartilage that protects the ends of the bones at the joints begins to wear out through use.

Arthritis at the base of the thumb is more common in women than in men and occurs after age 40.

Linda Humphries, who does accounting work for a major grocery chain

Are Your Hands Showing Signs of Arthritis?

Watch out for these symptoms of hand arthritis:

- Pain with activities that involve gripping, pinching or snapping your fingers
- Swelling and tenderness
- Aching after prolonged use
- Enlarged joint appearance
- Bump or bony prominence over joint
- Crooked fingers
- Limited motion

knows this first hand. After years of use, her left thumb became so painful, she says, “I began dropping things a lot and could not pick up little puzzle pieces with my grandchildren.”

Severe arthritis like Humphries’ can benefit significantly from surgical grafting, in which a piece of tendon from a patient’s forearm is used to replace the worn joint.

And, says Wolock, by using biologic tissue, there is no problem with rejection by the body.

Humphries’ results are excellent. “My thumb feels natural. My hand looks great and the scar is beautiful – just a very thin line,” she says.