

## Hand Osteoarthritis: Two Studies

*One study focused on prevalence; the other assessed the effect of occupational therapy on arthritis at the base of the thumb.*

Primary care clinicians probably underdiagnose hand osteoarthritis (OA) compared with knee and hip OA, which seem to get more attention in the medical literature. Two new studies address hand OA.

During a long-term prospective study of people with knee OA, researchers also inquired about arthritic hand symptoms and obtained hand x-rays at baseline and 4 years. Key findings among 3600 participants (age range, 45–79; mean age, 61) included the following:

- Baseline prevalence of *radiographic* hand OA was 41%, and baseline prevalence of *symptomatic* hand OA (i.e., symptoms that correlated anatomically with x-ray findings) was 12%. During the 4-year follow-up, prevalence of symptomatic hand OA doubled.
- Symptomatic hand OA prevalence increased with age and was more prevalent in women than men.
- Radiographic and symptomatic hand OA were more prevalent in people with moderate-to-severe knee OA than in people with less-severe knee OA; this finding suggests that OA can be a polyarticular disorder.

Osteoarthritis at the base of the thumb — involving the carpometacarpal joint — is a particularly bothersome site for patients with hand OA. In a randomized trial, 180 patients with thumb carpometacarpal OA received either usual care or multimodal occupational therapy. The intervention included education, exercises, orthoses (to stabilize the joint), and assistive devices (focusing on adaptations for kitchen utensils). At ≈14 weeks, mean scores for pain, grip strength, and general hand disability improved significantly with occupational therapy compared with usual care. About 1 in 5 recipients of occupational therapy had improvement that exceeded prespecified thresholds for clinically important changes.

### COMMENT

The first study provides useful background information and reminds us to inquire about hand pain and function, especially as our patients age. The second study shows that a comprehensive occupational therapy intervention can be useful for some patients with thumb osteoarthritis.

— **Allan S. Brett, MD**

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*Eaton CB et al. Prevalence, incidence, and progression of radiographic and symptomatic hand osteoarthritis: The Osteoarthritis Initiative. **Arthritis Rheumatol** 2022 Jun; 74:992. (<https://doi.org/10.1002/art.42076>)*

*Tveter AT et al. Short-term effects of occupational therapy on hand function and pain in patients with carpometacarpal osteoarthritis: Secondary analyses from a randomized controlled trial. **Arthritis Care Res (Hoboken)** 2022 Jun; 74:955. (<https://doi.org/10.1002/acr.24543>)*