

Ulnar Drift in Inflammatory Arthritis

What Is Ulnar Drift?

- The fingers “drift” to the side, or bend away from the thumb.
- Often caused by inflammation (swelling and pain) in the big knuckles.



- The structures that support these joints become weak and stretched.
- The finger tendons do not work properly and pull the fingers outward.

What Are the Symptoms?

- Swelling and pain at the big knuckles.
- Fingers point outwards.
- The joint moves out of place at the big knuckle.

How Is It Treated?

To reduce pain, swelling and to improve movement, treatment may include:

Heat / Cold / Contrast Baths

- Use heat at a comfortable temperature for 10 to 15 minutes, 2 to 3 times each day. Options: warm water, heat pack, or wax bath (do not use heat if the knuckles are very swollen).
- Use cold for 10 minutes, 2 to 3 times each day. Do not use cold if you have circulation or sensation problems in your hand. Wrap a cold pack/bag of frozen vegetables or ice in a damp cloth, and place it on the big knuckles.
- Contrast bath: Soak hands in cold water for 10 to 20 seconds and hot water for 5 to 10 seconds. Repeat for 10 minutes.

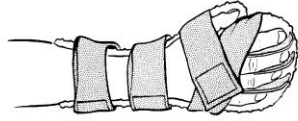
Splints

- Support the big knuckles in a straighter position.
- Reduce pain and joint stress.

Wearing instructions:

- Start by wearing splint for 30 minutes, check skin for redness, then increase wearing time as tolerated. If splint causes joint pain or your skin becomes sore and red, stop wearing the splint and contact your arthritis therapist for an adjustment.

- Resting splints are worn at night and when hands are painful and inflamed.



- Protection splints are worn during activities that cause stress to knuckles. It can help you with pinch with the thumb and index finger, but could limit full grip.

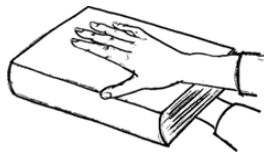


My splint wearing guidelines:

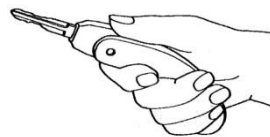
Joint Protection

Protect your finger joints from stress when doing everyday activities:

- Use both palms instead of just fingers to hold objects like a tray or book.



- Avoid activities that push against the side of your index finger, such as turning a key or pulling a file, or holding a heavy coffee mug handle.



- Try to use a "tip to tip" pinch instead, padded handles, or other adaptive equipment.

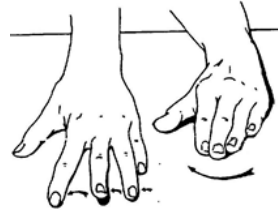


Exercise

1. Tuck: With your knuckles straight, gently curl the tips of your fingers to touch the base of the fingers. Hold 10 to 30 secs, then gently straighten your fingers. Try to do 5 to 10 repetitions once each day.



2. Finger walking: With palm flat on table, move out the thumb and then move each finger towards the thumb. Try to do 5 to 10 repetitions once each day.



3. Finger strengthening: Palm flat on table, place a pen against the thumb side of each finger. Keeping finger straight, gently push finger against the pen for 6 seconds. Try to do 3 to 4 reps, 2 to 3 times each week.



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