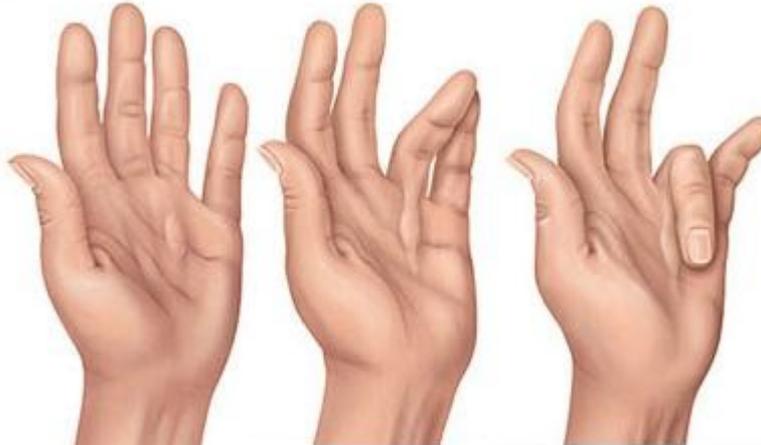


Dupuytren's Contracture



Dupuytren's Contracture involves a thickening of the deep soft tissue of the hand which passes from the palm into the fingers. Dupuytren's is a relatively common condition affecting approximately 1 in 6 over the age of 65. Men are affected more than women and it rarely affects those under 40.

Dupuytren's is a noncancerous condition and is usually pain-free. If the thickening goes across a joint then it can cause pain in the joint as it is pulled over into flexion. Sometimes it can be confused with a condition called trigger finger where the fingers can get stuck into flexion due to a nodule on a tendon getting trapped as it runs through the tunnel. However, you can straighten a trigger finger by pulling the finger straight. Dupuytren's you cannot.

Symptoms - As the hand thickens, it causes hard nodules or bands which over time shorten and tend to pull the finger/fingers into the palm. This can cause difficulties with everyday activities as the bent finger can catch on things or poke you in the eye as you wash your face.

Causes - The exact cause of Dupuytren's is unknown - although other medical conditions can increase your chances of developing the condition. These include: cirrhosis of the liver, diabetes, epilepsy and alcohol dependence. There is no evidence to suggest that manual work or using vibrating tools cause Dupuytren's.

Treatment - There are a few treatments available. Firstly, just stretch your hand palm down onto a flat hard surface. This minimises the contracture caused by the thickening on the palm of the hand. You can do this by leaning down through a hard surface stretching out your fingers. Lean gently, encouraging the fingers to be straight. Use your body weight as pressure. Try to get your wrist to 90 degrees.

Small steroid injections around the site of the contracture can also help. You can ask your GP about this via an e consult.

Lastly surgical release is possible. The aim of this is to correct the bend in your finger by removing the abnormal tissue and easing the tension on the skin. However like all surgery there is a risk associated with this such as nerve damage, infection and recurrence of the problem. Your hand will also be unusable for several weeks after surgery.