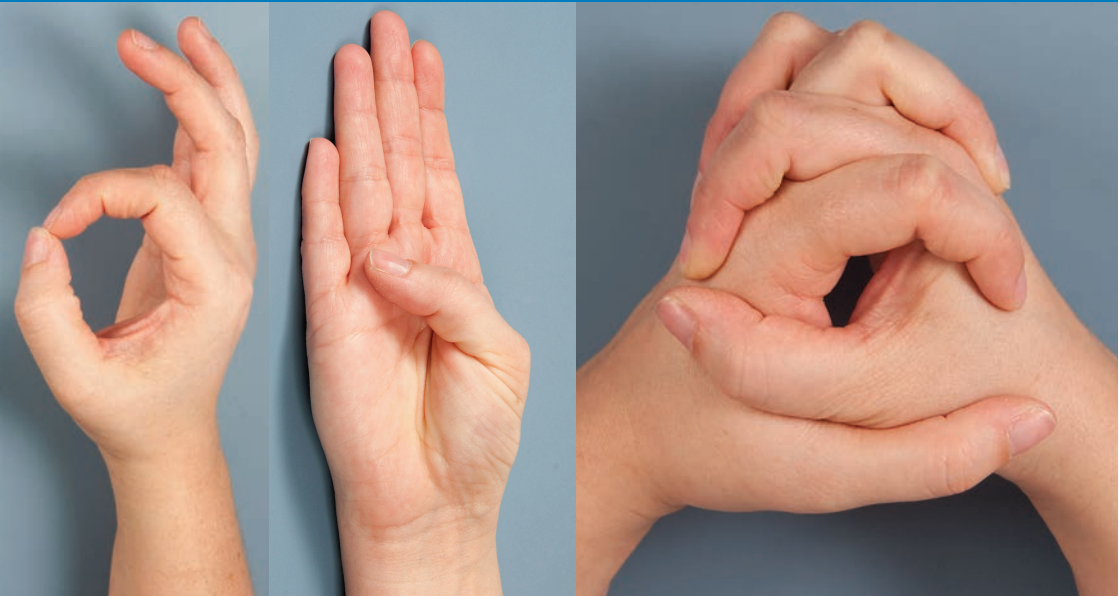


# Rheumatology hand exercises - flexibility



Irving Building  
Rehabilitation Services  
0161 206 5319

**Saving lives,  
Improving lives**

## What are the benefits of completing hand exercises?

Arthritis can cause the joints of the hand and wrist to become painful, stiff and swollen. Over time grip strength can weaken and sometimes joint deformities develop, making it more difficult to use your hands for day-to-day activities.

The exercises in this booklet aim to reduce pain, stiffness and swelling, improve joint flexibility and help to prevent the development of deformities.

## When should I do the exercises?

You should aim to do the exercises every day, even when your hands are not painful or stiff. Try to do them at a regular time to make them part of your daily routine; this way you are more likely to remember to do them.

If your hands are red, hot, swollen and more painful you may be experiencing a flare-up. You should still do the exercises but reduce the number of repetitions and length of hold.

## What should I do if the exercises make my hands more painful and stiff?

It is common to experience mild aching following exercise. If you find this continues for more than two hours after completing the exercises you should reduce the length of hold and number of repetitions next time.

If you continue to experience any problems stop doing the exercises and contact your therapist on the number provided at the back of this booklet.

It may not be necessary for you to do all the exercises; your therapist will tick the exercises that you should do and advise you how often they recommend you do them and if there are any individual changes that you should make to the exercise.

To start with just do one repetition of each exercise, increasing to two or three repetitions if this does not cause any discomfort.

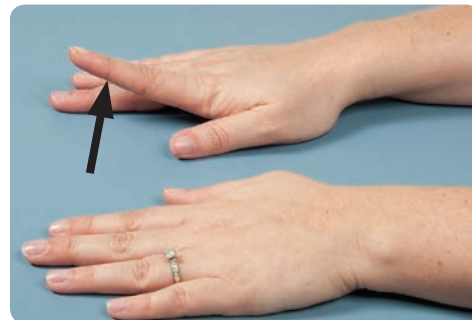
Each exercise should be done slowly, only bending and stretching as far as is comfortable. If an exercise causes you pain, reduce the range (distance you move the joint by) to a position that is comfortable for you.

## Exercise 1

### Daily / Weekly

This exercise helps to strengthen the muscles that straighten your fingers (active finger extension).

- Place your hands and forearms body width apart, palms down on a table
- Lift your thumbs up off the table, hold for 5 seconds, then relax
- Repeat with your index, middle, ring and little fingers in turn, making sure that the fingers not involved in the exercise remain flat on the table

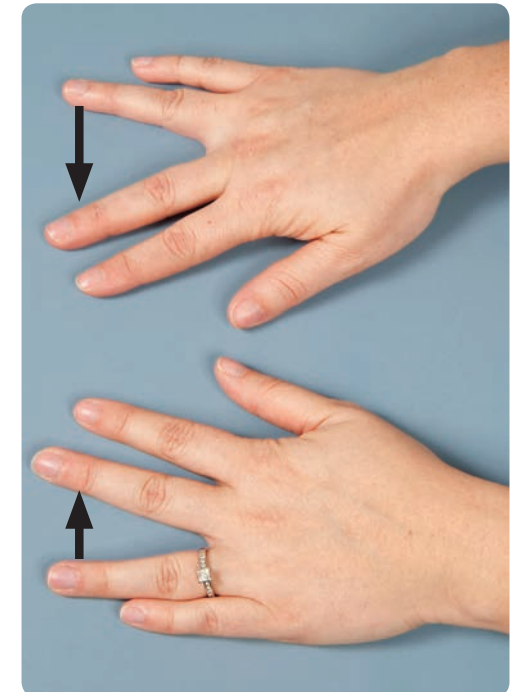


## Exercise 2

### Daily / Weekly

This exercise helps to prevent the fingers from moving sideways away from the thumb (ulnar deviation) by strengthening the muscles to keep your fingers straight.

- Place your hands and forearms body width apart, palms down on a table
- Starting with your index finger, lift each finger up and move it sideways towards your thumb. Repeat with each finger in turn
- At the end of this exercise lift your hand and forearm off the table and reposition if you are doing a second repetition
- **N.B. Do not walk the fingers back away from the thumb** as this will strengthen the muscles causing the deformity this exercise aims to prevent!



## Exercise 3

Daily / Weekly

This exercise helps to maintain the mobility of your thumb joints (thumb opposition).

- Place your hands and forearms body width apart, palms up on a table
- Bring your thumbs up towards the ceiling and hold for 5 seconds
- Move the tip of your thumb towards the base of your little finger and hold for 5 seconds
- Take your thumbs back up towards the ceiling and hold for a further 5 seconds
- Return to the start position

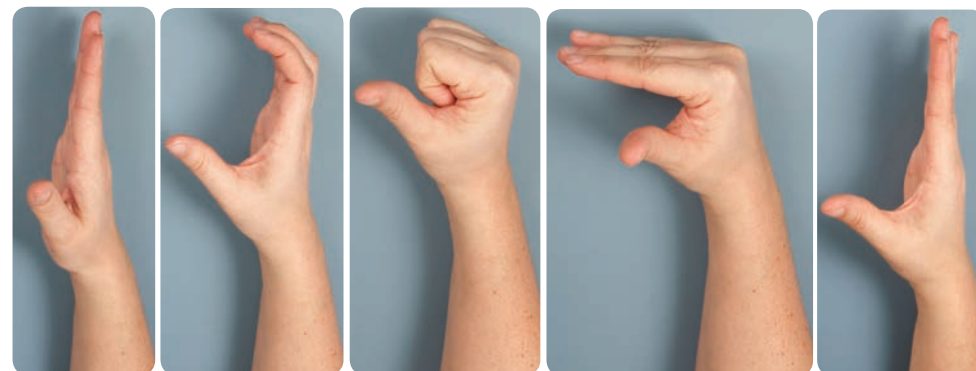


## Exercise 4

Daily / Weekly

This exercise helps to maintain the movement in the joints of your hands and to help the tendons to move smoothly (finger flexion/extension and tendon gliding).

- Rest your elbows on the table with wrists and fingers straight
- Bend the top two joints of your fingers and hold for 5 seconds
- Bend your knuckles down to bring your hand into a fist, holding for 5 seconds
- Keeping your knuckles bent, straighten the end joints of your fingers and hold for a further 5 seconds
- Straighten your knuckles so that your fingers return to the starting position



## Exercise 5

Daily / Weekly

This exercise aims to help maintain the mobility of the thumb and the ability to grip between the thumb and fingers (opposition).

- Rest your elbows on the table with your hands in the air
- Make an 'O' shape by touching your thumb and index finger (making sure that you are bending at all the joints of your thumb and finger) and hold for 5 seconds
- Repeat with each finger on both hands

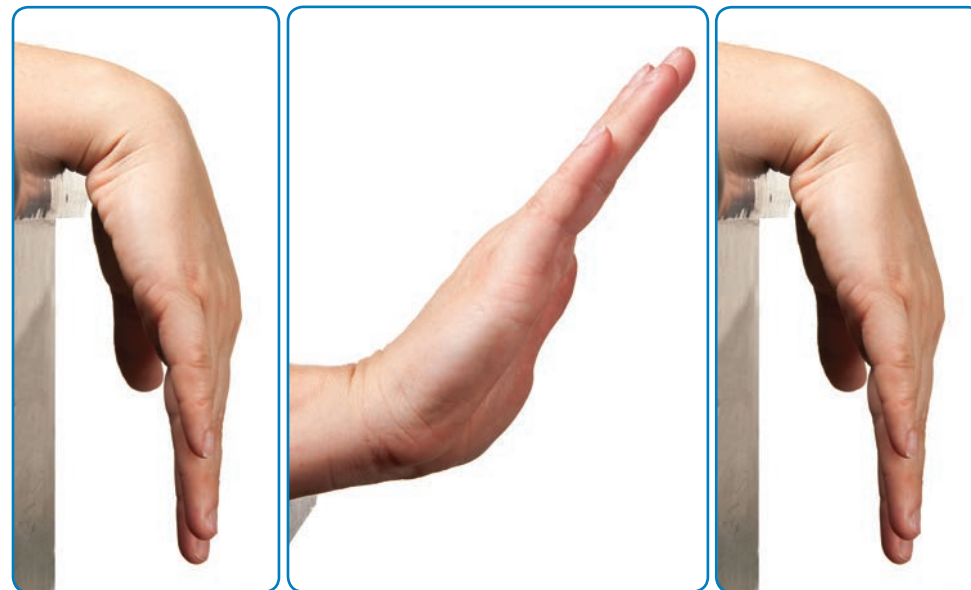


## Exercise 6

Daily / Weekly

This exercise helps to maintain the range of movement and strength of your wrists (active wrist flexion/extension).

- Place your forearm on the table or arm of a chair so that your hand is palm down over the edge
- Bend your wrist back so that your fingers point up towards the ceiling and hold for 5 seconds
- Next bend your wrist down so that your fingers point downwards and hold for a further 5 seconds



## Exercise 7

Daily / Weekly

This exercise helps to maintain the space between your fingers and strengthen the muscles in your hands (finger abduction/adduction).

- Stretch your fingers out so that they separate to create a space between all of your fingers
- Position your hands so that your fingers interlock with each other and clasp together, holding for 5 seconds



## Exercise 8

Daily / Weekly

This exercise helps to prevent stiffness at the joints involved in turning your forearm (pronation/supination)

- Place your hands and forearms body width apart, palms down on a table, keeping your elbows tucked into your side
- Roll your hands outwards (without moving your elbows or shoulders) so that your thumbs move up to the ceiling then back down towards the table and your palms face upwards
- Hold for 5 seconds then roll hands back to the starting position









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