

Argus Orthopaedic Zone

Curious Contractures of the Fingers

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

There is a curious condition that affects the palm of the hand and the fingers. The name of the condition used by doctors is (ready for this?) Dupuytren's Contracture. It was named after a French surgeon who described it long ago.

What Is It?

It begins as a thickening in the palm of the hand and gradually spreads as a fibrous cord to one or more fingers. It causes the fingers to be bent or flexed and they can't be straightened. It progresses slowly. After all this time we still don't know exactly why it begins.

What Does It Look Like?

Bumps in the palm of the hand near the base of the finger(s), usually ring and little fingers. The skin may pucker as the firm bands of tissue increase and grow into the fingers. The fingers begin to bend into the palm. It usually is not painful.

Who Is Affected?

Men get it mostly, but women do on occasion. Age of onset is between 40 - 70. Sometimes there is a family history of it. People who smoke and drink alcohol heavily get it more often. It often affects both hands.

First Treatment

Stretching exercises can be taught by a physical therapist or occupational therapist. This might control the process if it is not too severe.

Small amounts of steroid can be injected into the bands.

Some doctors have tried to "needle" the bands to break them up, but patients are usually squeamish about this. I can't blame them.

Surgery

In my experience most patients eventually have surgery to remove the nodules and bands. I remove as much of the thickened tissue that I can. It can be difficult, as the "scar tissue" can grow into the skin and be wrapped around important nerves. This makes the surgery quite hard to do. Patients can go home the same day. It is done either with general anesthesia or by "putting the arm to sleep".

Afterwards

I send you home with a pretty big bandage on your hand and lower forearm. Sutures are many and are left in for 10 - 14 days. Soreness continues for a few weeks and exercise of the fingers has to begin early and continue for weeks in most case.

Surgery can certainly benefit most patients. There is no guarantee that the contracture may not develop again. This is unusual though in my experience.

Good Advice

It is better to have it checked sooner than later. Early treatment can have a much better outcome.

Office Website and Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive

Don't forget to check out the entirely new office website, www.orthopodsurgeon.com, Your Orthopaedic Connection and the Argus Orthopaedic Zone Archive of all back articles.

It is a huge amount of information about all the things I treat in the office and hospital.

Our goal is simple - To help people return to more pain free, functional lives. I specialize in you.

Good health. Good life. All the best to you.

Be well.

Dr. Haverbush