



Thumb Joint Replacement (CMC Replacement)

This handout explains thumb joint replacement surgery as performed by Dr Chen Tu using the **Elis thumb replacement system**.

Why Is Thumb Replacement Needed?

Thumb joint replacement is most commonly performed for **arthritis at the base of the thumb**, also known as **carpometacarpal (CMC) joint arthritis**.

This joint is essential for pinch and grip. Arthritis can cause:

- Pain at the base of the thumb
- Weak grip and pinch
- Difficulty with everyday tasks such as opening jars, turning keys, or writing
- Reduced hand strength and function

What Is Thumb Joint Replacement?

Thumb joint replacement involves replacing the arthritic joint surfaces at the base of the thumb with a prosthetic implant. Dr Chen Tu uses the **Elis thumb replacement**, which is designed to preserve thumb movement and joint mechanics while relieving pain.

The aims of surgery are to:

- Reduce pain
- Restore thumb movement
- Improve pinch and grip strength
- Allow earlier return to functional use of the hand

In appropriately selected patients, thumb replacement can allow **earlier recovery of strength and function** compared with trapeziectomy-based procedures.

The Operation

- Surgery is performed as **day surgery**
- Local anaesthetic is used, which can result in numbness of the hand for **6 to 36 hours** after surgery
- The arthritic joint is replaced with the Elis thumb implant
- At the end of surgery, your hand is placed into a **protective backslab splint**





After Surgery

- Swelling and stiffness are expected early on
- Pain usually improves steadily over the first few weeks
- The backslab protects the thumb during early healing

You will be referred to a **hand therapist** shortly after surgery.

Splinting and Hand Therapy

- You will see a hand therapist to have a **custom splint made**
- **Gentle range of motion** is started at this stage under guidance
- Total splint time is usually **around 4 weeks**
- Therapy then focuses on improving strength and pinch function

Recovery and Timeframes

Recovery varies between individuals, but typical expectations are:

- **First 2 weeks:** swelling settles, gentle movement begins
- **4 weeks:** splint discontinued, increasing functional use
- **6 weeks:** improving pinch and grip strength for light activities
- **4–8 weeks:** many patients are able to return to driving if comfortable and confident
- **3 months:** good functional use for most daily activities
- **6–12 months:** continued improvement in strength and endurance

Compared with trapeziectomy, thumb replacement may allow a **quicker return to functional strength** in selected patients.

Driving

Driving can usually be considered **between 4 and 8 weeks after surgery**, provided that:

- You are no longer wearing a splint
- You have comfortable control of the steering wheel
- You feel confident performing an emergency stop

The exact timing varies between individuals.

Contact Information

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Conclusion

Thumb joint replacement using the Elis system is an effective option for painful thumb arthritis in selected patients. The aim is to relieve pain while preserving movement and strength, with many patients experiencing earlier recovery of function compared with trapeziectomy. Dr Chen Tu and the team at Wakefield Orthopaedic Clinic will guide you through surgery and recovery.