

Orthopaedic Connection

"Why Does My Thumb Hurt?"

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Transforming patient information into patient understanding.

This is one of the most common complaints I hear in my office. When I ask a few questions, this is a typical story. The patient has had the problem for several months and no one seems to be able to figure out why the thumb hurts.

Even if they had an x-ray, it was probably diagnosed as "negative". Many patients have also had a nerve test for carpal tunnel and that was reportedly negative too. The office of the primary care physician called the patient and said their x-rays and nerve test were "negative". The patient tells the office they still hurt, but the office person relaying the message doesn't know what else to tell them, so they say goodbye. Ugh. Now what? So the person keeps hurting and is frustrated.

What Is Going On?

Arthritis in the base of the thumb is easy to overlook as a diagnosis. I see it all the time. The hand x-ray often is under diagnosed. Arthritis at the base of the thumb does not appear on the report to the primary care office. The nerve test is negative, because the person does not have carpal tunnel. They have arthritis of the base of the thumb, but no one is picking it up.

How Do I Diagnose It?

Pretty simple actually. I press on the spot where the thumb joins one of the little wrist bones. The patient says "OUCH"! Next I move the thumb putting pressure on the joint. More ouch.

A simple 3 view hand x-ray is done down the hall in my office and in about 5 minutes I have the diagnosis. The combination of examining the patient carefully and looking at the x-rays myself is magic. It works every time.

I don't need a CT scan or MRI or bone scan.

I don't mean to be too hard on the radiologist reporting the film to the primary care office, because the radiologist of course never examines the patient and mild to moderate changes on the x-ray often go undetected by the radiologist.

OK, Now What?

There's a lot to talk about here. In the interest of space available, I'll have to cover the management of this very common condition next week. Please come back. I promise you will learn a lot. See you next week.

**Office Website www.orthopodsurgeon.com, Gratiot County Herald
Archive of Articles**

There is so much Orthopaedic information in the website and archive it is amazing. Check it out. Soon!

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