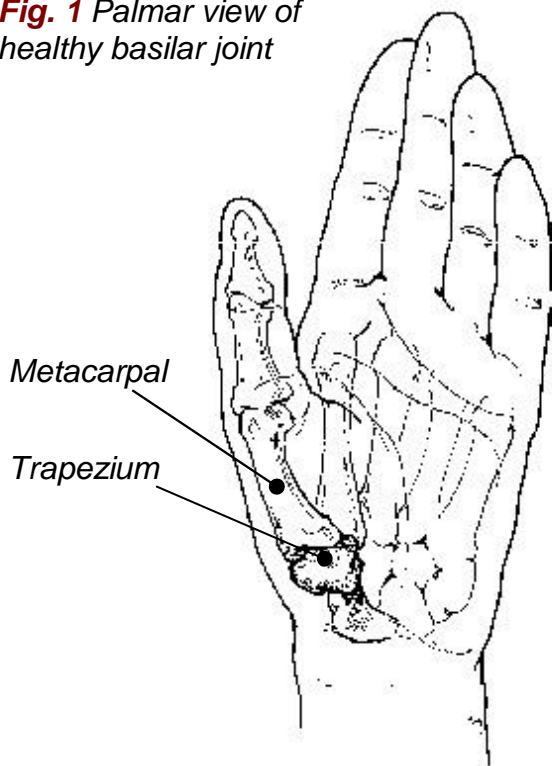


**BASILAR JOINT ARTHRITIS.** The basilar joint (base of the thumb) is formed by a small bone in the wrist (trapezium) and the first bone in the thumb (metacarpal) (Fig. 1). This joint enables the thumb to move in many directions for gripping and pinching.

The basilar joint commonly develops arthritis. Osteoarthritis, or degenerative arthritis, is a condition that develops from the gradual “wear and tear” on the joints. Cartilage covers the ends of bones. The cartilage creates a smooth surface that protects the bones from wearing down by allowing them to glide smoothly against each other. With osteoarthritis, the cartilage slowly wears away until the bare, unprotected ends of the bones begin to rub together, destroying the joint and causing pain, swelling, and stiffness.

Injuries to the thumb can make you more likely to develop arthritis in the basilar joint. People whose basilar joint arthritis is caused by osteoarthritis often begin to have symptoms after age 40. Women develop arthritis in the basilar joint more commonly than men do.

**Fig. 1** Palmar view of healthy basilar joint



**Symptoms.** The first symptoms of basilar joint arthritis you might notice include weakness and pain:

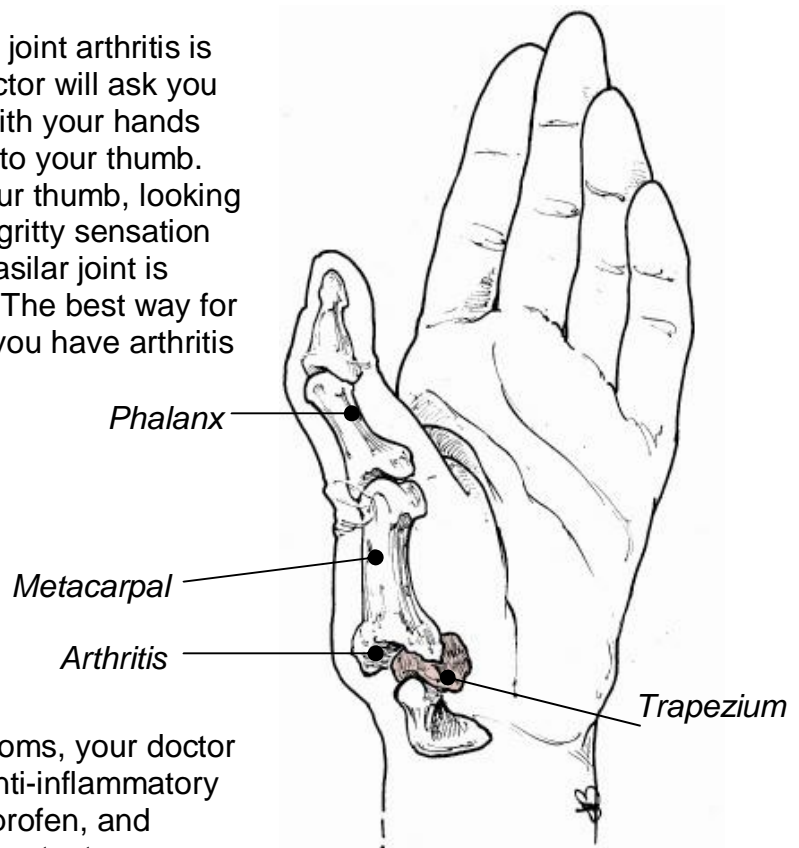
- It may be hard to grip and turn things such as a key, door knob, or jar lid.
- Your thumb hurts with weather changes such as when it rains or becomes colder.
- Your thumb hurts when you use it a lot.
- You may also notice a lump in your wrist that looks like the basilar joint is getting bigger and your thumb is coming out of joint.

The condition eventually causes the thumb to collapse into the palm. When this bone moves toward the palm, the second bone in the thumb

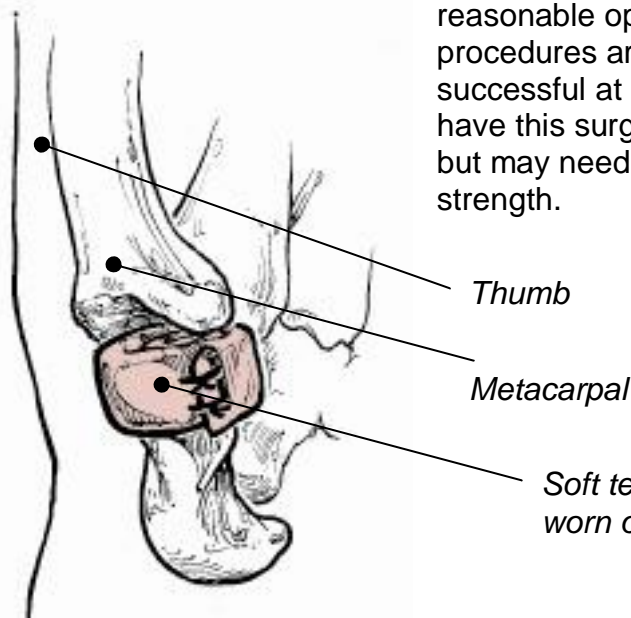
(phalange) bends outward (hyperextends) to help compensate when you grip an object (Fig. 2).

**Diagnosis.** To find out if basilar joint arthritis is causing your symptoms, the doctor will ask you what activities you have done with your hands and what injuries you have had to your thumb. The doctor will also examine your thumb, looking for pain and swelling. Pain or a gritty sensation felt when the area around the basilar joint is pressed might indicate arthritis. The best way for your doctor to find out whether you have arthritis is to take x-rays.

**Fig. 2** View of arthritic basilar joint



**Treatment.** To treat your symptoms, your doctor first prescribes resting, taking anti-inflammatory medicine such as aspirin or ibuprofen, and wearing a splint to support and protect your thumb. If your symptoms do not improve, your doctor may give you a cortisone (a strong anti-inflammatory medicine) injection to relieve your pain. If your symptoms still do not go away, surgery is a reasonable option (Fig. 3). Several different procedures are available. They are usually very successful at decreasing pain. Most people who have this surgery are relieved of their symptoms but may need months to completely recover their strength.



**Fig. 3** The doctor may reconstruct your basilar joint if other treatments do not relieve your symptoms

Soft tendon spacer or cushion replaces the worn out bone that the doctor removed.

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