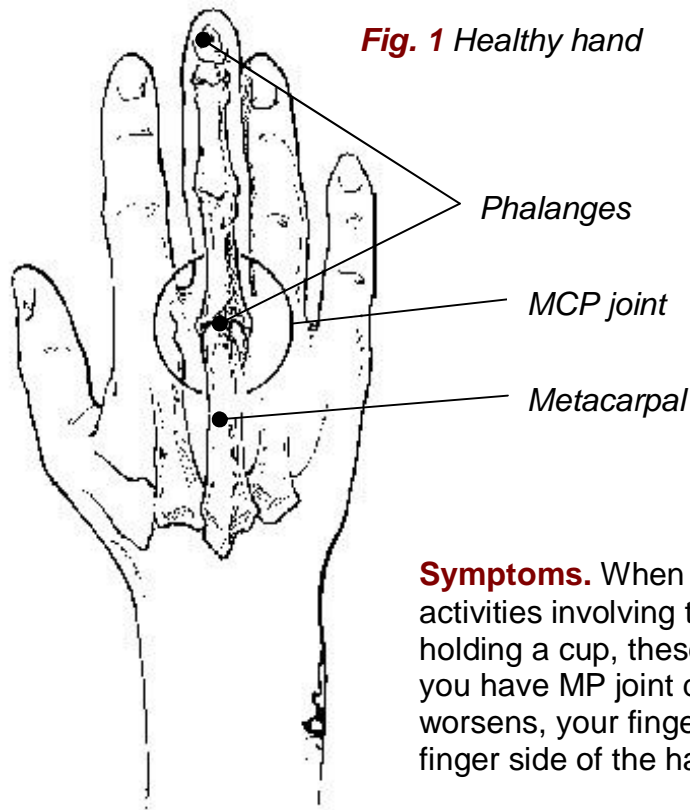


MP JOINT DISEASE. The metacarpophalangeal (MP) joints, or the knuckles, act like hinges between the bones in the hands (metacarpals) and the bones in the fingers (phalanges) and enable you to grip things and to make a fist (Fig. 1). Rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, gout, and trauma can damage the MP joints and the surrounding muscles, destroying the ability of the joints to move normally and causing pain and deformity.



Symptoms. When deformity or pain make daily activities involving the hands difficult, such as holding a cup, these problems often indicate that you have MP joint disease. As the condition worsens, your fingers begin to lean toward the little finger side of the hand (Fig. 2).

Causes. The leaning of the fingers with MP joint disease can be caused by problems with the ligaments, which connect two bones, or with the tendons, which connect muscle to bone. When disease attacks the ligaments in the fingers, it can cause the ligaments to become so loose they cannot hold the bones together at the MP joint. Without tight ligaments, the fingers slowly move out of joint. Tendons attacked by the disease often move out of place so they cannot

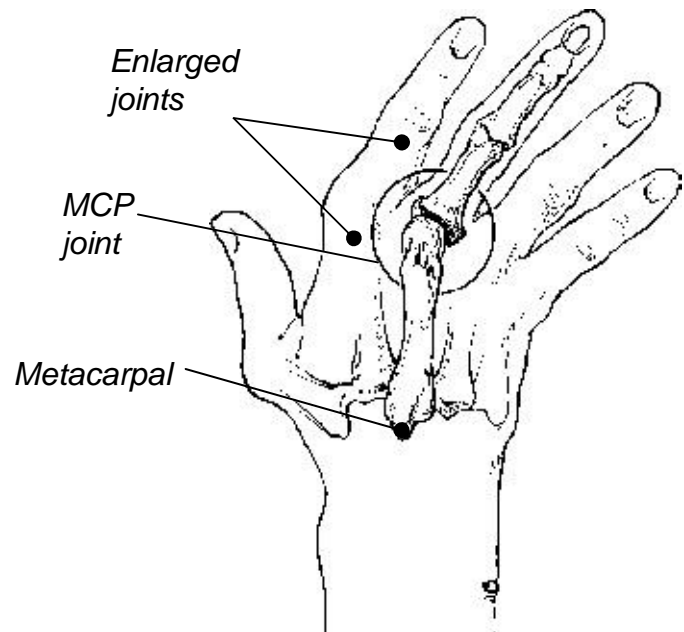


Fig. 2 When you have MCP joint disease, your fingers move toward the little finger side of your hand.

straighten the fingers.

Treatment. MP joint disease is treated to relieve your pain and to help you move your fingers more normally. If you seek treatment for the symptoms of MP joint disease early, you might not need surgery. The doctor might prescribe wearing a splint, having anti-inflammatory injections, or taking anti-inflammatory medications, such as aspirin or ibuprofen. You might also need to change the activities you do with your hands. If these treatments do not work or if the disease has done major damage, you might need surgery.

One type of surgery for MP joint disease is called synovectomy. This operation is usually done in people who have minor damage caused by the disease. The doctor might put slipped tendons back in place or might repair damaged muscles. Another type of surgery, called joint replacement, is reserved for people with major damage caused by MP joint disease. The MP joints of people who have this type of surgery are so diseased that they must be replaced with artificial (man-made) joints (Fig. 3). Some people might need a second joint replacement several years after the first replacement because artificial joints wear out over time.

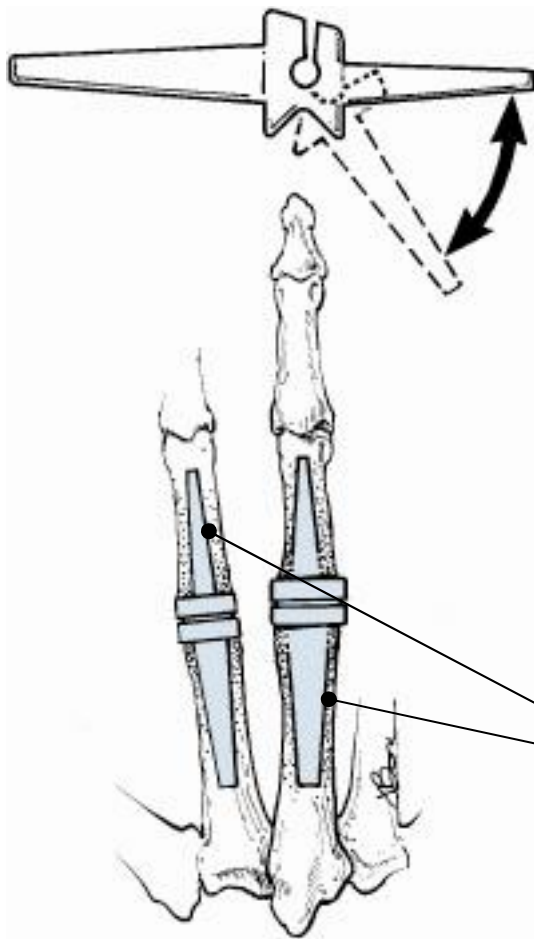


Fig. 3 Side view of the artificial joint

Rehabilitation. After surgery, your hand is kept still in a splint for a few days so healing can begin. To strengthen and restore motion to your fingers, you will begin a rehabilitation program combining exercises and splints. This program usually lasts for 6 weeks after surgery, but some people might need a longer to regain strength and motion.

Artificial joint spacers in the fingers

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