

**Berggren M, Joost-Davidsson AJ, et al. Reduction in the Need for Operation After Conservative Treatment of Osteoarthritis of the First Carpometacarpal [CMC] Joint: A Seven Year Prospective Study. Scand J Plast Reconstr Hand Surg 2001; 35:415-417.**

Design: Randomized clinical trial/observational cohort study

Brief summary of results:

- 33 women (mean age 63, age range 46-80) with isolated CMC osteoarthritis, who met criteria for surgery but were placed on waiting lists, were treated conservatively in Hand and Orthopedic department in the UK and Sweden
- Randomized to three distinct conservative therapy plans: technical accessories only (n=11), semistable textile splint (n=11), and leather splint (n=11)
- Technical accessories consisted of devices provided by occupational therapists: bread saw, scissors, pen handle, cheese cutter, etc.
- The other two groups received the same technical accessories, and in addition received either a semistable textile or a non-stable leather splint
- After 7 months, only 10 of the 33 patients wanted an operation: 3 in the accessories only group, 4 in the semistable splint group, and 3 in the leather splint group
- After 7 years, 4 patients had died (3 in the semistable splint group, 1 in the leather splint group) and only 2 additional patients wanted an operation, 1 in the leather splint and 1 in the semistable splint group
- No patients had adduction contracture at the outset of the study, and none developed contractures during the 7 year follow-up
- Patients who declined an operation were, on average, older (mean age 65) than those who wanted an operation (mean age 59)

Authors' conclusions:

- Conservative treatment of thumb OA can be successful in 70% of patients over a period of 7 years
- Younger patients who are still working may be more likely to want an operation than those who are older, retired, and less active
- Patients with similar problems should be offered 6 months of similar conservative treatment before choosing an operation

Comments:

- While not adequate as a randomized trial (method of randomization not stated, concealment of allocation not done), the study is useful for understanding the natural history of thumb OA
- The numbers are too small to support any conclusions about the splints, but they seem to have added nothing to the special accessories that may have enabled the patients to adapt to their condition

Assessment: Adequate for an evidence statement that most patients with mild OA (no contracture) may not require surgery if they are provided with appropriate accessories