

HEALTH UPDATE

Getting The Upper Hand On Severe Joint Pain

(NAPS)—Help may literally be at the fingertips of the thousands of Americans who suffer from rheumatoid arthritis or other damage to the finger joints. While most people are familiar with replacement of a damaged hip or knee, many are unaware that a similar procedure is available for painful, disfigured small joints.

A new Web site, *www.HandHealth.net*, offers consumer information and guidance about small joint reconstruction using specially designed implants—a surgery that can greatly improve the ability for people with severe arthritis to function on a daily basis.

“Small joint reconstruction gave me back my life. If only more arthritis patients knew about it, they might be able to spare themselves years of chronic pain and loss of function,” said one Arizona resident who had a number of her finger joints replaced.

Hundreds of thousands of people worldwide have benefitted in the 30 years since the implants were pioneered by Alfred Swanson, M.D., F.A.C.S., who remains active as a surgeon with Orthopaedic & Reconstructive Surgeons in Grand Rapids, MI.

The new *www.HandHealth.net* Web site provides details about the small joint reconstruction procedure, and includes before and after photos and testimonials as well as a short quiz to help determine if hand surgery may be an option.

Before small joint implants were developed, the only surgical treatments available were to remove the damaged joint surfaces, and either fuse the joint in a stiff functional position, or allow scar tissue to form between the



Before and after small joint reconstruction. The treatment is described at www.HandHealth.net.

bone ends to give some joint mobility. These procedures, while still indicated in many cases, often do not provide the mobility and stability needed for good function.

Small joint reconstruction does not restore the joint to normal; however, it does relieve pain and allow for a greater range of motion. The surgery is recommended by hand surgeons in select cases.

Rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis affect nearly 40 million Americans, or about one in seven people. Women are affected more than men, by a ratio of about three to one.

For further information about how small joint reconstruction may help you, talk with your physician. For more information about surgical treatments for the hand, or for a referral to a qualified hand surgeon in your area, contact the American Society for Surgery of the Hand (ASSH) at (847) 384-8300 or visit the Public Information section of the ASSH site at www.hand-surg.org.