



Paul M. Apostolo, M.D., is Senior Attending Orthopaedic Surgeon and Chief of Hand Surgery at St. Agnes Hospital. He provides specialized care of the knees, hips, shoulders and hands.

Healthy hands

To learn more about hand surgery at St. Agnes Hospital, visit www.stagnes.org or call 410-368-3330. For more information about Dr. Apostolo, visit www.handsandjoints.com or call his office at 410-368-4851.

LAST YEAR, LYNDA Gaidis, of Woodbine, knew she needed to call her orthopaedic hand surgeon when the arthritis in her thumbs made every movement with her hands painful, she says.

This was not the 66-year-old retired librarian's first call to Paul M. Apostolo, M.D., Senior Attending Orthopaedic Surgeon and Chief of Hand Surgery at St. Agnes Hospital. Ten years before, she experienced increasing numbness, tingling and aching in both hands. The pain affected her work, her hobbies, even her sleep.

"Basically, at work I was limited as to what I could do," she says. "Sleeping at night was painful. Discomfort was something I had all the time. My wrists hurt continuously and my fingers tingled."

After having carpal tunnel surgery on each hand, which involved two eight-minute procedures, and a week sporting Band-Aids on her wrists, Gaidis was pain-free and fully functional.

"St. Agnes Hospital, a leader in minimally invasive procedures of the hand, has made treatment for problems like carpal tunnel syndrome, trigger fingers and most other common problems easier than ever," Dr. Apostolo says. "In the case of carpal tunnel surgery, the patient is home by lunch, showering the next day and back in the office in three days."

Gaidis says she was most impressed by how fast relief came. "I was amazed at how quickly I recovered. I think within a day or two I was able to use my hand again, pain-free." Perhaps most important, she was able to resume her favorite pastime—quilting—with "no problem," she says. "Having Dr. Apostolo operate on it was such an incredible relief. It was just like a godsend."

RELIEF FOR THUMB PAIN

Gaidis returned again in 2005 with the new problem of saddle joint arthritis in her thumbs. Dr. Apostolo operated on each of her hands using a pioneering procedure that replaces the thumb joint with a tendon from another part of the forearm. Instead of two bones grinding together causing constant pain, the thumb rests on a soft new cushion, says Dr. Apostolo. Since there are no artificial parts, as in a hip or knee joint replacement, the relief can last for the rest of a person's life without needing more surgery.

"It relieves the pain—that's the key. I

Don't put up with painful hands

Visit a hand surgeon if you have any problem that interferes with the normal use of your hands for work or daily activities, including sleep, or if you have any mass, trauma or other abnormality.

When caught early, treatment with nonoperative procedures is common, and surgery, if necessary, is almost always on an outpatient basis with minimally invasive techniques and minimal time lost from normal activities.

Never accept a poorly functioning hand just because you are getting older, or have diabetes or another debilitating disease.

Hand surgeons are subspecialists with primary specialties in orthopaedic surgery, plastic surgery or general surgery.

can use the thumb and I don't have the horrible pain all the time," says Gaidis.

DON'T WAIT TO FIND HELP

Care for painful conditions of the hand has improved dramatically over the past two decades, Dr. Apostolo says. "Twenty years ago, treatment of hand disorders required an overnight stay in the hospital and casting for two weeks or more. Recovery is less painful and speedier with modern techniques."

Many patients suffer too long with severe hand discomfort before seeking medical attention, he says. With carpal tunnel syndrome, pain occurs when the median nerve, which provides sensory and motor functions to the thumb and three middle fingers, is compressed, causing numbness or tingling sensations in the hand.

Thumb arthritis is more common than knee, shoulder and hip arthritis, conditions that Dr. Apostolo and St. Agnes' team of orthopaedic doctors also treat with joint replacement and other minimally invasive techniques.

"At St. Agnes Hospital, we have a large group of very dedicated, highly trained surgeons who provide a complete range of services," Dr. Apostolo says. "What really sets us apart is our friendly and professional support staff, who offer not only skilled, efficient care, but great compassion as well."

What to do about hernias

RUPTURES—THAT'S ANOTHER NAME for hernias, and it's easy to understand why. With the most common hernias, the abdominal wall weakens, bulges or actually tears. Sometimes this allows tissue or part of the intestines to protrude.

The main types of hernias, according to the American Medical Association, are:

Inguinal, which occur in the groin area between the abdomen and thigh. A naturally weak spot near there, called the inguinal canal, increases the risk for this type of hernia, especially in men.

Epigastric, which appear in the upper-middle abdomen above the navel. Men are three times more likely to get this type of hernia than women.

Femoral, which happen most often in women, especially if they are overweight or have had several pregnancies. This hernia appears as a bulge on the upper, inner thigh near the groin.

Incisional, which can occur near the scar from an abdominal surgery.

Umbilical, which are sometimes present at birth, behind the baby's navel. In children, they usually disappear by age 5. Umbilical hernias also occur in adult males and females, especially if they are overweight.

Hiatal, which form when a portion of the stomach slides into the chest cavity.

The American College of Surgeons and other experts say these factors can lead to hernias:

- Lifting heavy objects.
- Chronic constipation that results in straining during bowel movements.
- Overweight or pregnancy.
- Persistent coughing or sneezing.
- Sudden twisting, pulling or straining of a muscle.

A hernia emergency can cause painful swelling, vomiting and lack of bowel movement. If you have any of these symptoms, call 911 immediately. A strangulated hernia can be life-threatening.

MORE >> To learn more, go to www.stagnes.org, choose "Health Library" under "E-Health Resources," then select "Hernia" under the Health Topic Centers.



Advanced inguinal hernia treatment

The Center for Minimally Invasive Hernia Repair at St. Agnes Hospital has a number of highly skilled and experienced surgeons who specialize in advanced treatment of inguinal hernias.

Most procedures are done in as few as 30 minutes. Patients are able to return home from the hospital the same day and may be back to work in just a few days.

For more information about the center or our fall seminars, please call **1-866-970-WELL (9355)**.