

### **Jim's experience with Dupuytren's and with NA in Las Vegas**

My Dupuytren's started about 12-14 years ago on the ring finger of my left hand. By the end of winter of 2010 it had a permanent bend of over 90° and restricted many of the things I wanted to do.

Up until the spring of 2010 I was pretty much able to compensate for it by not putting things in my left pants pocket and using my right hand for what I had to do. I'm a golfer and skier and interestingly enough, Dupuytren's was not much of a hindrance in holding a ski pole and swinging a golf club. On the other hand (pun intended), last spring was the deal breaker when it became difficult to put on and take off a golf glove 18 times a round and then when ski season started, stuffing my hand into a ski glove was so much a chore I didn't want to take the glove off for anything. Further, a very bent finger could not be moved as one needs to do to keep the hand warm. It was time for some action on my part.

My family doctor had ID'ed my Dupuytren's late last century and at the time dismissed all solutions other than surgery as unproven. I've been keeping an eye on the Internet for alternative treatments and over the past few years I noticed that information on needle aponeurotomy took a real jump as a potential low-impact solution. I told my doctor (who embraces some alternative medicines but is a skeptic of many) and he asked that I see his hand surgeon, so I did.

The hand surgeon examined my hand and described a number of treatments, saying that surgery was the preferred treatment, but that recently he'd been doing these "needle release" procedures with great success. I asked him how many he had done and he indicated about 25. Reporting this to my doc, he gave me the green light to go ahead and get it done.

Here in Telluride, CO, at almost 9000' in the Rockies, most everything is far away. Jupiter, FL and the Bay Area were a bit far to travel but through the Dupuytren Society's website I found Dr. Ryan Grabow in Las Vegas, just a nine hour drive (not to mention the added benefits of lots of great things to do there). Not only did I find that he'd done over 1000 needle releases, but we were able to speak for two extended phone conversations which gave me great confidence in him.

In the second week of January, off to LV I went, played a round of golf in 60° temps in the morning (kept my glove on the entire round) and was examined by Dr. Grabow that afternoon. His office has testimonials on the wall from golfers, baseball players and Paul Anka, thanking him for fixing their hands. The needle release procedure was scheduled the next day.

The next day Jason, Dr. Grabow's assistant, got me ready and instilled further confidence by treating me like I was important to them, chatting intelligently and giving me lots of good info. Dr. Grabow came in, sterilized my hand and got to work. While the Eagles were on the sound system and the video full of synchronized colors played, Dr. Grabow numbed my hand and finished his work on it in about 30 minutes.

Now I have to tell you that the procedure was painful and uncomfortable. The numbing shots hurt and the constant stretching of my finger while the cord was being cut was not a happy time. But it wasn't that bad. After, there were about six cuts on my hand along the cord, one a 1/6" hole. These were bandaged and the hand iced. Compared to surgery it was probably a breeze.

(I cannot overemphasize how important ice is to the management of pain and discomfort. Not just in this case, but in many, many bumps and pulls of body tissue, ice applied to the injury makes all the difference in reducing pain and swelling. D-Oh!)

A week later and all the pain is gone when I'm not putting any strain on the hand. All the cuts are pretty much healed and even the hole is closed up. It hurts when I try to do anything that stretches my hand backward but I am able to make a weak fist without pain. I've been wearing a brace at night to keep my hand straight and it's very stiff and painful until the hand gets warmed up to movement each morning.

I probably have gained about 60° actual movement in the first joint of my finger but it's really the overall movement I have gained in the two affected joints that are making a difference. My hand is starting to work again like it is supposed to. I went skiing yesterday and am able to put on and remove my gloves with an ease I haven't had for two or more years. I can now reach our restricted light switches and hold a bar of soap in my left hand to wash.

I plan to wear the brace for the next few months and work my hand to get as much movement as I can out of the affected joints. I've had to relearn how to type as I'd been compensating for my inability to reach certain letter on the keyboard, hitting the "3" for the "w" and the "w" for the "s" but that got fixed in a couple of days of typing with the new hand.

It's not a miracle and not perfect, but I am very happy with my decision to get needle aponeurotomy and how it has turned out so far. Having heard many anecdotes on hand surgery for this condition, I would not consider it while there is this alternative.