

ACTIVE ANGLER



In October 1992, Rick Morris found himself on Lake Guntersville in the thick of a Bassmaster Megabucks competition. Five years later, he was fishing in the Bassmaster Classic at Lake Logan Martin, and 21 years after that, he did the same at Lake Hartwell. In between, Morris finished second at the 2006 event on Lake Toho and logged an unfathomable number of miles both on the road and behind the wheel of his bass boat.

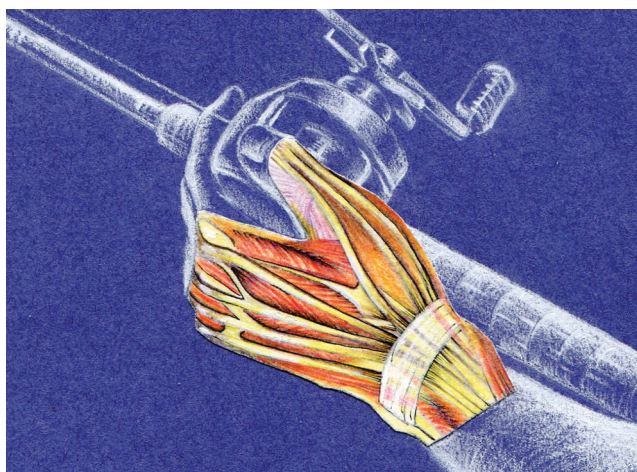
"I went pro at 30," the chipper, 57-year-old Elite Series veteran recounts. "I've had three trucks that each logged over 300,000 miles on them. I've spent five and a half years in the truck seat, and in over 250 B.A.S.S. events, I've spent that much time or more in the boat."

For Morris, those miles and those casts have added up to decades' worth of nagging injuries, but none more serious than arthritis in his thumb, diagnosed about 10 years ago.

Sure, a thumb injury sounds petty. However, try to go bass fishing without the use of this opposable digit and you quickly realize how important it is. If arthritis attacks this particular finger, the results can be devastating.

Ask Morris about the condition, and he'll tell you a horror story. To this day, he recalls the grizzly details in a squeamish tone. "It really started to bother me in my mid-40s. At first, I noticed my left-hand thumb began to get sore in practice. I would find myself in pain during practice, wondering how I was going to make it through the tournament."

COMBATING AILMENT



Arthritis Of The Thumb

The affliction was likely caused by years of repetitive casting and reeling motions, combined with a steady pressure applied to Morris' thumb by heavy-fishing tackle. "Everyone knows I'm a power fisherman," he explains. "I like heavy-duty, large baits, 20- to 65-pound braided line and 8-foot rods. I don't usually fish slow, either. I make bazillions of casts. On each of those casts, my left hand was palming the reel and my thumb was supporting the weight of the rod."

By the mid-2000s, a sports injury specialist was telling Morris that those casts had taken a heavy toll. "He X-rayed both of my hands, and it was scary looking. I could see all of the places that weren't perfect anymore, and I was thinking, 'Oh, my God, I'm not going to have hands anymore!' The doctor listed a bunch of pro golfers and pro football guys he had worked with and told me he'd never seen anything this bad before."

According to the specialist, for Morris to fish again, he'd need an invasive surgery. "When I heard what they were going to do, I had to ask twice. I told him, 'Are you sure? I need these hands!' He told me he was going to scrape the arthritis off of my thumb, cut a tendon away from my wrist, move it to my thumb and tie it into it. It was the worst surgery I ever went through in my life."

Product Spotlight

Created from a synthetic replica of natural insecticides found in chrysanthemum flowers, permethrin is an insect-repelling treatment that's safe for clothing, animals and boat carpet. Sawyer's Premium Insect Repellent is an odorless, nontoxic spray that kills ticks, mosquitos, spiders, chiggers, mites and other no-see-ums.

Permethrin won't prevent you from developing arthritis in your hands, but it might help you prevent covering those digits in insect bites. Treating your clothing the night before a trip can greatly decrease the amount of insects able to land on your clothing or boat. It will last six weeks on items that are not washed, and up to 35 days on dogs. A 24-ounce spray bottle will cost about \$15.



PREVENTION

The surgery left Morris' arm lifeless in a sling. At night, he found himself crawling on the floor, writhing in pain. "My girlfriend was chasing me through the house, asking how she could help. I had no idea what to do with that pain."

Today, he carries incision marks on his hand and wrist from the procedure. A few weeks after surgery, he was able to gain 60 or 70 percent usage in the arm and hand, but it's taken years to make it back to 95 percent, where he says he is currently.

Unfortunately for dedicated anglers, preventing arthritis is no easy task. Your body is going to pay a tax for years of repetitive motion; however, you can lessen the impact by using lighter tackle and practicing some general health rules.

According to Healthline, inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen can be used to ease pain and reduce inflammation.

Consuming certain fish oils rich in omega-3 fatty acids can help reduce the risk of arthritis, as does regular exercise and maintaining a healthy overall weight. Smoking increases your risk of developing some forms of arthritis. The Arthritis Foundation recommends that smokers cease the habit to reduce their chances of developing the disease.

Additionally, arthritis can sometimes be effectively treated if diagnosed within two years of developing the condition. If you believe you may be developing symptoms of arthritis, see a doctor.

