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Man loses thumb, gets toehold on life

Surgeons at Fortis-Noida graft toe from left foot in place of right thumb

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EKLAVYA GAVE away his right thumb to Guru Dronacharya and lost out on his chance to become the best archer in the world.

Had he been alive today, he could have walked into Noida's Fortis Hospital and got a replacement. Like Uma Shanker Sharma did recently.

Sharma was eight when his right thumb got chopped off with a fodder cutter. So, the Aligarh resident grew up feeling disadvantaged.

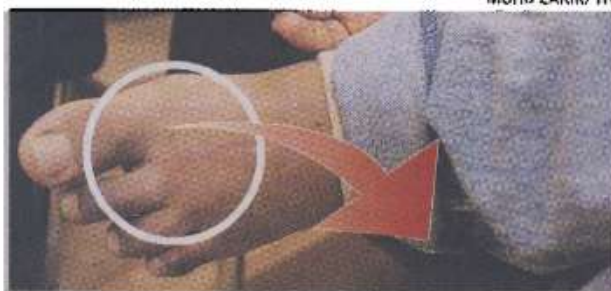
"I couldn't hold the mouse properly and it was also difficult to type quickly," said Sharma, who wants to become a software engineer.

Toetal recovery

Now 18, Sharma has got back his thumb, albeit by sacrificing one toe.

Using a 40-year-old technique, surgeons at Fortis, Noida transplanted a digit from his left foot in place of the missing thumb.

In a nine-hour operation, two surgeons spent one-and-a-half hours to first dissect the toe and then almost the same time to graft it on the patient's thumb area.



Sharma's left foot now has four digits. (Below) Sharma shows his new thumb.

"The blood vessels were joined under a microscope with more than eight tiny stitches, using fibres almost one-third the width of a human hair," said Dr Manoj Johar, reconstructive and cosmetic surgeon at Fortis, Noida.

The surgery cost Rs 1.5 lakh, which is about a lakh less than using an artificial implant.

Sharma's father Prem Chand Sharma, 43, is delighted.

"It is a miracle. I didn't know something like this was possible," he said.

Sharma senior had started enquiring about transplant possibilities after his son fell off his bike

a few times over the last six months.

"It was dangerous for him to ride a bike but I did not want to stop him from doing what he wanted. I looked for a solution and here we are," said the father.

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THUMBS UP FOR TOES

■ Doctors say toe-to-hand transplants are cheaper and easier to do than artificial implants or bone reconstruction.

■ "Toe-to-hand brings back normal sensation, good function, strength and even looks good," said Dr Sunil Choudhury, director, reconstructive surgery at Max Healthcare in Saket.