

Bond Girl Draws Attention to Babies Born with Extra Fingers or Toes

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(PhysOrg.com) -- One of the Bond Girls in the new James Bond movie is drawing attention to a relatively common congenital condition called polydactyly -- extra fingers or toes.

Gemma Arterton, who plays Agent Fields in "Quantum of Solace," opening Nov. 14, was born with six digits on each hand. The extra fingers were removed during childhood.

Polydactyly takes several forms, said hand surgeon Dr. Terry Light of Loyola University Medical Center. Extra digits can be located next to the thumb, next to the little finger or in the middle of the hand. The digits typically are smaller and abnormally developed. Some babies have two thumbs on each hand, while other babies have seven or eight fingers and no thumb.

Light has operated on hundreds of polydactyly patients. He is chairman of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery and Rehabilitation, Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

In the easiest cases, the extra digit is soft, floppy tissue with no bone. The pediatrician or hand surgeon ties a suture around the base and the digit falls off after a few days. This is how Bond Girl Arterton's polydactyly was treated. "It's my little oddity that I'm really proud of," Arterton told Esquire magazine. "It makes me different."

More complex cases involve a digit that has split into two fingers or two

thumbs, neither of which is normal. A split thumb, for example, has a Y shape. The surgeon combines parts of both branches to create one thumb. Light recently performed this procedure on a baby named Marina Styrzcula-Di Tullio of Bensenville, Il.

Light removed Marina's extra thumb and rebuilt the remaining digit. Maria's new, single-digit thumb is a bit shorter than a normal thumb, and the tip might not be as flexible. But it otherwise looks pretty normal, her mother said, adding, "We expect that Marina will have very good use of her thumb."

The most complicated cases involve hands with seven fingers and no thumb. The surgeon removes two of the extra fingers. Another finger is moved to where the thumb should be. The surgeon fashions this digit into a thumb, by shortening it and rotating it to face the fingers, Light said.

Polydactyly occurs in at least 1 in 1,000 newborns, making it one of the most common congenital hand conditions. About 40 percent to 50 percent of cases have a genetic cause. For example, former Chicago Cubs relief pitcher Antonio "Six Fingers" Alfonseca, who had six digits on each hand and foot, said his grandfather also had polydactyly. The extra finger did not affect Alfonseca's pitching because it did not touch the ball.

Provided by Loyola University Medical Center

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