Community Division

Helpful Advice for People with Rheumatoid Arthritis

Learn to protect your joints

There are certain basic rules concerning everyday life and work which will help to prevent excessive wear and tear on your joints.

- **Avoid strain** - Don't lift heavy items. Use a trolley where possible. It is not just heavy items which can strain your joints. Use a bookrest or a pillow instead of straining your finger joints when reading a book.

- **Distribute strain** - Use two hands when lifting, or distribute the weight over several joints.

- **Learn to compromise** - Work out ways to do things which will spare your joints as much as possible, and use the minimum muscle strength. Make sure that you take lots of rests. Remember, pain is a warning signal.

There are not many things that you must not do. It is the way that you do them which matters!

The basics

- **Distribute the strain over as many joints as possible** - Use both hands to carry objects such as cups, use a trolley in the supermarket instead of a basket.

- **Use the largest joint possible** - Carry a shopping bag or handbag over your arm or shoulder instead of carrying them in your hand.

- **Do not grip things too tightly** - This can put a lot of strain on the joints. Make the handles bigger with padding so that you don't put as much strain on your hands when gripping.

- **Do not hold joints in one position for too long** - Change position regularly. For example, if you are knitting or perhaps sanding something down or even typing at a word processor, change position often by getting up and moving around or by stretching.

- **Do not push your fingers towards your little finger (ulnar deviation) when gripping** - This happens when for example, you hold a plate or turn a key in a lock. Using a different grip, or using a device which alters your grip (a key holder in this example) helps to avoid this movement

- **Keep a healthy balance between rest and activity** - Rest regularly, before you get tired, but don't rest long enough to get stiff.

- **Use labour saving aids and gadgets where appropriate**

Using equipment to help is not 'giving in' but merely protecting your joints and increasing your independence.

- **Watch your weight** - Being overweight puts stress on your joints.

compassionate care

Housework and Cooking

Using equipment	Choose long handles, padded if necessary (cutlery, pan handles etc).
Vacuuming	Avoid carrying the vacuum cleaner, particularly up and down stairs. Get someone else to do this if you can.
Bedmaking	When tucking in bedclothes, turn your hands over with your palms downwards. Better still, use a continental quilt.
Wringing	Wrap cloths etc around the tap and twist with both hands to wring out the water.
Peeling vegetables	Use a peeler with a swivel blade to reduce wrist movements. Choose one with a broad handle or use padding if necessary to reduce strain on your fingers.
Straining vegetables	Place vegetables in a chip basket in the pan. This can be lifted out, and the vegetables shaken dry. Another way is to use a large perforated spoon to lift out and strain the vegetables.
Lifting pans	Use two hands, or place your other arm under the wrist of the hand which is holding the pan so that the weight is distributed more evenly. Another way is to slide pans over the work surface.
Tipping a kettle	Use a kettle tipper which allows you to pour water from the kettle without lifting it. Fill the kettle from a jug rather than carrying it to and from the sink.
Opening tins	A wall mounted tin opener is easier than a hand held opener. It should be mounted at a comfortable height. Some electric tin openers are easy to use but make sure you try before you buy.
Opening jars	Can be difficult for two reasons: **Holding** - Use a damp cloth, or Dycem non-slip matting. Ask the occupational therapist about a belliclamp. **Opening** - Unscrew the lid with your right hand, put it back on with your left hand (see basic principles). Also there is helpful equipment available. Ask the occupational therapist.
Carrying objects	Carry plates, trays etc resting on your upturned palms and fore arms to distribute the weight over several joints. Use two hands, or better still use a trolley.

Shopping and laundry

Carrying shopping

Shop little and often. If shopping has to be carried, use a shopping trolley. Push the trolley rather than pull it.

Using bags

Try not to carry a heavy handbag. Carrry your bag with a strap over your shoulder or forearm.

Washing machines

Front loading machines are easier to use. Set a clothes basket on a stool level with the washer door so you don't have to bend too much.

Hanging clothes

Lower the clothes line if possible when hanging out clothes and have the clothes basket on a stool to avoid bending. The old fashioned pegs are easier to use than the spring loaded ones.

Laundry symbols

When buying bedding and clothes, choose easy care materials to reduce hand washing and ironing. Check the laundry symbols before you buy.

Ironing

Use a lightweight iron and an adjustable height ironing board. Learn to iron sitting down. Better still, choose fabrics which don't need ironing.

Getting dressed

General tips

Sit to dress, this uses less energy. Don't choose clothes that are tight fitting or have back zips. Small buttons may also be difficult to fasten.

Zips

Fit a ring, or tie some ribbon or tape to the zip pull to make it easier to grip.

Hooks

Hooks and eyes on clothes can be replaced with velcro fasteners. Ask the occupational therapist.

Underwear

Back fastening bras can either be fastened at the front and then turned around to the back, or else sewn up at the back and a new fastening made at the front.

Skirts, coats, jackets

If these are lined, they will go on much easier.

Footwear

Choose footwear carefully. Think about comfort and support. Lace up shoes can be adapted by using elastic laces which do not have to be tied and untied.

Ties

Once a tie is knotted, leave it tied and just ease it off over your head. Bow ties can be bought ready knotted with either a clip fastening or on elastic.

Adapted clothing

For advice on adapting, or buying specially adapted clothes, see the occupational therapist.

Assistive equipment

There are several 'gadgets' which can help with dressing. Ask the occupational therapist.

Personal care

Bathing / showering

If you are having problems please ask the occupational therapist.
There is various bathing equipment available, ranging from grab rails fixed on to the wall to electrically operated bath lifts.
Each application for equipment is assessed before it is supplied.

Neck and back

Use a long handled back scrubber. Loofahs with a handle are a good idea.
For drying, attach a loop to each end of a hand towel.
Slip your hands through the loops and pull the towel from side to side.

Nails

Use a nail file with a padded handle. Alternatively, you could use a battery operated nail care kit

Teeth

Pad the handle of your toothbrush, or adapt the shape of the handle (ask the occupational therapist) so it is easier to hold. Or use an electric toothbrush. Use a key type tube squeezer for toothpaste. If you have dentures, soak them in cleaner.

Shaving

Choose an electric shaver with switches you can manage and which you can grip easily. Pad the handle of a wet razor for a better grip.

Toilet care

'Spontex' dishmop with slits cut in to hold the toilet paper can be used.

Toilet transfers

There is helpful equipment including grab rails and raised seats. If you feel you need this you should ask the occupational therapist.
Each application for equipment is assessed individually before supply.

Hair brushing

Handles on combs and brushes can be padded and lengthened, and angled for easier use. Please ask the occupational therapist.

Making things easier

Make the most of your time and energy. Think about the tasks you do and make them as easy as possible. If you do this you should not be too tired for doing the things you enjoy after you have dealt with necessary jobs.

Here are some tips:

- **Plan ahead**
  Think about what you have to do during the day and put jobs into a logical order.
  For example, do together all the jobs which have to be done upstairs to save running up and down the stairs too many times.

- **Break down the job**
  If the task is large, break it down into sections or time periods and do a little at a time.

- **Organise your work area**
  Have the things you use regularly close at hand. You won't waste energy through moving about constantly. Reorganise shelves and cupboards so that everyday items are the easiest to get to.

- **Sit down**
  If you can, sit to do things (standing takes more energy). Do not keep in one position for too long though. Stretch your arms and legs. Get up regularly and move around a little.

- **Rest**
  Take short periods of rest regularly through out the day. Don't be tempted to get a job finished before you rest. If you can take short breaks during the day you are more likely to have energy left for the things you enjoy doing afterwards.

- **Share the work**
  Don't feel bad about passing some of the work on to someone else. Encourage them and spend time with them explaining how to do things. This way they will eventually be able to do the job as well as you can.

- **Take care with lifting and carrying**
  If you have to move something yourself, make sure you lift properly (back straight, legs bent). Better still, get someone to help or even to do the lifting and carrying for you. Or you could use a trolley or similar.

Splints / Orthoses

You may at some point be advised by the doctor or therapist to wear splints.

There are a number of different types but the two most common ones are:

- **Work splints**
  These can be off the shelf or custom made. They are worn to support your wrists when you are actively doing something, whether it is a job or a leisure activity.

- **Resting splints**
  These are custom made. They support your wrist and your hand and fingers. They are worn at night or when you are resting.

Why wear splints?

- To reduce pain and swelling.
- To rest joints.
- To improve or maintain the proper position of the joints.
- To reduce or prevent deformity.
- To protect a joint or painful area.
- To support and stabilise joints during activity.

If your splints are uncomfortable

Contact the occupational therapist as they can probably be altered to give a better fit.

Contact details

If you need to know more, please contact the Occupational Therapy department.

If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

The Inpatient Therapy Department
Huddersfield Royal Infirmary
Acre Street
Lindley
HD3 3EA

Telephone No: 01484 342434 or 01422 224198

www.cht.nhs.uk

If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

Potřebujete-li tyto informace v jiném formátu nebo jazyce, obraťte se prosím na výše uvedené oddělení

Jeżeli są Państwo zainteresowani otrzymaniem tych informacji w innym formacie lub wersji językowej, prosimy skontaktować się z nami, korzystając z ww. danych kontaktowych

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