

A Physical Therapist Provides Tips on Joint Protection

If you have arthritis, it is most important that you make a conscious effort to take good care of your joints. Joint protection is one strategy to help you manage your arthritis pain. This will help prevent unnecessary joint damage. Taking the time to think ahead and plan ways to avoid unnecessarily stressing your joints may help you reduce your arthritis pain. This is not always easy when daily activities consist of pushing, pulling or twisting motions that can be painful. Though you may want to work through your arthritis pain, doing so can aggravate the situation. It is important to understand that most joints should be kept active but in the proper manner.

Here are two joint protection techniques to manage your arthritis pain.

Tip 1: Be careful how you use your hands.

Fingers are used in many day-to-day activities. Stressful positions and techniques may increase the risk of pain. You can perform most tasks in easier ways that put less deforming forces on your joints.

- Avoid positions that push your other fingers toward your little finger. For instance, avoid tasks that require forceful or prolonged gripping or pinching. Finger motions should be in the direction of your thumb whenever possible. For example, don't brush crumbs off a table with your palm flat on the table. Instead, turn your hand so that the little finger is resting on the table and the palm is facing you. Then push the crumbs off the table.**

- **Avoid making a tight fist. Use tools with thick or ergonomically designed handles, which make them easier to hold.**
- **Avoid pinching items between your thumb and your fingers. Hold a book, plate or mug in the palms of your hands. If you're reading for long periods, use a book holder. Instead of a clutch-style purse, select one with a strap to carry on your forearm.**

Tip 2: Use good body mechanics

The way you position your body largely affects how much strain you put on your joints. Proper body mechanics allow you to use your body more efficiently and conserve energy.

- **Make sure you have good back and foot support when you sit. Your forearms and upper legs should be well supported, resting level with the floor.**
- **If you type at a keyboard for long periods and your chair doesn't have arms, consider using wrist or forearm supports.**
- **Increase the height of your chair to decrease stress on your hips and knees as you get up and down.**
- **To pick up items from the floor, stoop by bending your knees and hips.**

- **Carry heavy objects close to your chest, supporting the weight on your forearms.**

Keep an open mind about how you do everyday tasks. You might have to change some old habits, but the reward is that your joints may cause you less pain and last longer. Ask your Physical Therapist for a joint evaluation and for specific recommendations.