

Joint protection techniques for hands

Our hands are vital to independent daily function. How we use our hands makes a difference to the stresses being placed on the joints. By changing the way we move, we can reduce the stresses on the affected joints. This can reduce pain and fatigue and make everyday activities easier. Using Joint Protection Principles is all about changing the habits of a lifetime which is not an easy task.

There are six main principles of joint protection.

1. Use joints in a stable position
2. Avoid activities that do not allow for a change of position
3. Respect pain
4. Avoid tight grips or gripping for long periods
5. Avoid deforming positions
6. Use one large joint or many joints

Use joints in a stable position

Painful joints cannot tolerate as much stress as healthy joints, so pushing, pulling or twisting motions can be painful. Try changing positions so that weight is evenly spread over several joints.

- Sit or stand as close as you can when working at a table or bench as this reduces stretching and bending.
- Use a grip that keeps the wrists straight and the fingers in line with the wrist as much as possible.

Avoid activities that do not allow for a change of position

Be mindful of how long you have been doing certain activities, joint and muscles do not like to be held in the same position. They become stiff and work less effectively which leads to pain, damage and further deformity. When writing, doing hand work, release your grip every 10 to 15 minutes. On long car trips, get out of the car, stretch and move around at least every one to two hours.

Respect pain

If you have arthritis, you may always have some pain. If pain continues for hours after activity has stopped, this indicates that the activity was too much and should have been changed or stopped sooner. Your therapist will discuss with you ways of dealing with pain.

These might include the use of splints to support or immobilise your joints, saving energy, learning relaxation, planning and pacing the day's activities and using equipment to help with certain activities.

Avoid tight grips or gripping for long periods

Gripping tightly increases pain and can cause further joint damage. Gripping small objects require greater force and often an increase in pain through the joints. These are some examples of how to decrease joint strain:

- Use thicker or padded tools, i.e. pens, knife, toothbrush.
- Rest books on a table, book rest or large pillow.
- Use a chopping board with spikes to secure vegetables.
- Allow hand washed pots/pans to air dry
- Avoid wringing out hand washing by using your washing machine spin cycle.
- Regularly stretch your hands during knitting, writing or sewing.
- Build up objects using foam tubing or special grip aids
- Use a tea towel or non-slip matting to stop mixing bowls slipping

Avoid deforming positions

Certain directions of force through your hands can be more detrimental than others. This leads to damage to your joints and further deformities. Changing the way that you do certain activities can prevent this from happening.

- When opening new or tight jars consider using a gripping aid and direct the force through the palm of your hand rather than just through the fingers. There are several types of jar opening devices . Ask others to undo the lids, while you close them.
- Use a flat hand when possible for cleaning, wiping, dusting.
- Try using cups with larger, straighter handles than cups with curved handles.
- In general, finger motions should be in the direction of the thumb whenever possible.

Use one large joint or many joints

Use your smaller, weaker joints for the specific tasks that only they can achieve. Try using larger joints throughout the day as they are stronger and distribute the applied forces more evenly. This is less likely to cause fatigue and the development of deformities.

- Carry objects with your palm open to distribute weight equally over your forearms.
- Slide objects along a counter or work bench rather than lifting and carrying them.
- Carry light bags on your shoulders rather than with your hands.
- When standing up from a chair or bed, rock forward and use your leg muscles rather than pushing up from your knuckles or wrists.
- Use your hip or lower leg to close drawers.

Sources of information

Arthritis Research UK, www.arthritisresearchuk.org.

Further Information

If you have any questions or queries regarding any of the information, please do not hesitate to ask your Specialist Therapist in the Occupational or Physiotherapy Department.

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) – details below.

Hand hygiene

The trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Hand cleansers are widely available in each clinical area for patients and visitors to clean their hands.

Other formats

This information is available in alternative formats such as large print or electronically on request. Interpreters can also be booked. Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) offices, found in the main reception areas:

Conquest Hospital

Email: esh-tr.palsh@nhs.uk - Telephone: **01424 758090**

Eastbourne District General Hospital

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After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

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