

Protecting Your Joints

When you have rheumatoid arthritis

This handout explains how to help protect your joints when you have rheumatoid arthritis.

Use each joint to its greatest range as you go about your day.

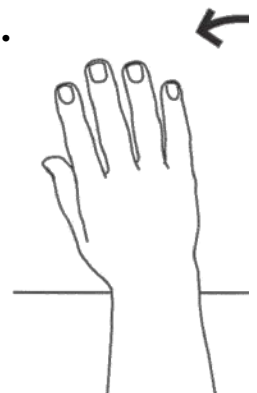
- Follow the daily home exercise program your occupational therapist gave you. It is vital for your joint care and will help with range of motion.
- Every day, do tasks that move your arms and legs and bend your trunk to their greatest range. For example, reach for light objects from the floor or from the highest shelf you can comfortably reach.



Every day, do tasks such as reaching for light objects from a shelf.

Support and protect your hand joints.

- Move your hand in the direction of your thumb when you reach for or grasp objects.
- Never support your body weight or lean your head on your fist or on the thumb side of your hand. Use your palms to support that weight whenever you can.
- Do not tightly grasp or pinch heavy or odd-shaped objects.
- Use larger or built-up handles on objects such as eating or kitchen utensils, grooming items, and tools. Ask your occupational therapist about what handles will be helpful for you.



Move your hand in the direction of your thumb when you pick up objects.

- Whenever you can, use chairs with fairly high seats. This will lessen strain on your hands and knees when you sit down and stand up. When you must use your hands to support yourself, do **not** lean on the thumb side of your hand. Instead, keep your hand open and try to press down with the base (the part nearest your wrist). You can also press down on the little-finger side of your hand.
- Use the strongest joint you can for whatever you are doing:
 - When lifting, keep your knees and hips bent. Do not use your back. This position allows your larger muscles and joints to do the work.
 - Use a wrist loop for tasks such as opening cabinet doors, pulling on clothing, and zipping or unzipping.
- Use good posture for muscle balance, to reduce effort, and to lessen stress on your joints:
 - When you are sitting at a desk, the desk surface should be about 2 inches below your elbow.
 - When you are standing at a counter to work, the surface height should allow you to keep your back straight and to use your arms freely.
- If you are doing an activity that keeps you in the same position for a long time, find ways to move your joints often. If you do any long-distance driving:
 - Relax your grip on the steering wheel from time to time.
 - Get out of the car and stretch for a few minutes. Do this at least once every hour, and more often if you can.
- Be sure to get periods of rest and activity each day:
 - Rest before you get too tired. This will help build your endurance.
 - Change how you do your work to reduce extra tasks and movement. This will help save your energy.
- Respect your body when it is in pain. Learn to tell the difference between general discomfort and unusual pain that might occur during exercise or activity.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

Occupational Therapy:
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