Protecting Your Joints

When you have rheumatoid arthritis

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

Move Your Joints Every Day

- Follow the home exercise plan your occupational therapist gave you. These exercises help keep your joints moving.
- Each day, do activities that move your arms, legs, and body as far as you comfortably can. For example, reach for light items on the floor or on a shelf that you can reach safely.

Protect Your Hand Joints

- When you reach for or hold something, move your hand toward your thumb.
- Do **not** use your fist or the thumb side of your hand to support your body weight or your head. Use your palm to support you instead.
- Do not tightly hold or pinch heavy items.
- Use kitchen and bathroom items with larger handles.



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

Use Your Strongest Joints

- Use chairs with higher seats when you can. This puts less stress on your hands and knees when you sit down or stand up.
- If you need to use your hands for support:
  - Keep your hand open.
  - Press down with the base of your hand near your wrist.
  - You can also press down with the side of your hand near your little finger.
- When lifting, bend your knees and hips. Do not bend or lift with your back.

Use Good Posture

Good posture helps your muscles work better and puts less stress on your joints.

- When sitting at a desk, the desk should be about 2 inches below your elbow.
- When standing at a counter, keep your back straight and make sure you can move your arms easily.

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Change Positions Often

- If you stay in the same position for a long time, find ways to move your joints often.
- If you drive a long distance:
  - Relax your grip on the steering wheel from time to time.
  - Stop and get out of the car to stretch for a few minutes at least 1 time every hour.

Balance Rest and Activity

- Rest **before** you become very tired.
- Change the way you do tasks to avoid extra work and movement.
- Make time for being active and resting each day.

Pay Attention to Pain

- Listen to your body when you have pain.
- Learn the difference between normal discomfort and unusual pain during exercise or activity.
- Stop and talk with your healthcare provider or occupational therapist if your pain is getting worse or feels unusual.

Questions?

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

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