

Arthritis Hand Care Tips

Arthritis can affect all joints including the small joints of the hand. Your hands are constantly busy. Everyday activities, such as preparing a meal, working at hobbies, carrying grocery bags, or using your computer can damage joints over time. Joint protection techniques can help reduce pain, stress, and inflammation of joints. These techniques also can help prevent further deformities and increase independence in daily activities. There are many easy and inexpensive ways to protect your hands. Here are a few tips to keep your hands healthy:

- If you have pain during an activity, stop the activity. Pain is one of the best ways your body has of letting you know you are causing tissue damage.
- Protect the small joints of your hands. Do not carry several plastic grocery bags at once. Use paper bags, carry them one at a time, and hold them at the bottom.
- If writing is painful, try using a thick, rubber grip pen with a gel tip or roller ball to decrease the amount of pressure used.
- Remember to stretch and take rest breaks every 15 minutes during repetitive or prolonged activities such as needlework, painting, sewing, knitting and crocheting, hammering and filing.
- Notice which activities aggravate your symptoms and avoid or modify them. Don't be afraid to ask others for help.
- Use pump shampoos, conditioners, and toothpaste. Use the palm of your hand to pump instead of squeezing the container.
- Use enlarged grips on everyday equipment or tools to reduce strain on joints. Examples include potato peelers, gardening tools, tooth brushes and hair brushes. Do an internet search for "adaptive equipment" to see what is available.
- Get rid of your manual can opener - go electric! Manual can openers place excessive strain on fingers and thumb.
- Always use the right tool for the job: pliers for tight pinching or a small hammer for pounding.
- Keep scissors and knives sharp to minimize your own efforts.
- Always use two hands when lifting heavy objects.
- Do not tear your mail open. Use a letter opener.
- Use utility scissors in the kitchen rather than ripping open bags.
- Use a staple remover instead of your fingers and thumb.