

Coker Rehab Services

Principals of Work Simplification/Energy Conservation For The Arthritic Patient

Using these methods has saved housewives as many as 64 miles in the preparation of one meal per day during a year.

PLANNING WHENEVER POSSIBLE

Planning Your Activities. Avoid unnecessary walking, stair climbing, lifting, bending, stretching, and stooping.

1. **Work on an assembly line basis.** Accomplish more in less time and with less effort.
2. Have **all necessary equipment and supplies together** before sitting down or starting an activity.
3. Work on **one task at a time** to avoid running between tasks.
4. **Eliminate extra trips up and down stairs.** Instead, gather items on a table located near the stairs.
5. **Use wheels** to transport. It is helpful to **have a utility cart** on wheels to use in many activities.
6. **Slide objects along table or counter-top** whenever possible. Use both hands to lift objects or do activities.
7. Investigate whether **adaptive equipment** could be helpful to you.
8. Put **cleaning supplies in a carrying case** or in a large apron with pockets to avoid extra steps.

Clean and Organize Work Centers

1. Get rid of all unnecessary equipment or objects or **store the least-used objects** so that you have more space. Unnecessary equipment or objects so that you have more space. Unnecessary objects mean more to move around.
2. Place and **store objects at point of first use.**
(Example: Store the can opener near the canned goods.)

3. Keep most **frequently used items** within **easy reach**. Consider using a pegboard, Lazy Susan, Rubbermaid products, pullout shelves, etc. . . .

Plan your daily and weekly activities **in advance**. Allow time so that there is **no need to rush**. Be sure to include a good balance of work and leisure activities.

1. **Get up early enough** to allow time to shower without having to rush. Give yourself a **chance to limber up**.
2. Plan your tasks for the day to save energy – when you make a trip from your usual place of work, see if you can **use the trip for several purposes (shopping, running errands, visiting, etc . . .)**

USE THE STRONGEST JOINTS AVAILABLE FOR ANY ACTIVITY

The joints closer to your body are larger and, therefore, are stronger.

Use proper body mechanics. Remember to **use your knees** (not your back) to **lift objects** and **slide objects** whenever you can.

1. **Plan work** and **work areas** carefully in order to **avoid unnecessary bending, stretching, stair climbing, walking, standing, and lifting**.
2. When **carrying objects**, use your stronger joints by **holding the objects close** to you.

Use your **palm and/or forearm instead of fingers**, allowing the wrist and elbow to do more work.

1. Hold purse or shopping **bags over your forearm** instead of your fingers. (Shoulder bags are also a good idea.)
2. **Steady a mixing bowl in the crook of your arm** when stirring or place the bowl in a shallow top kitchen drawer to help stabilize.
3. **When writing, steady your paper with your forearm** rather than fingers, or use a clipboard. Use a computer instead of writing whenever possible.
4. **Use a pen to dial the telephone** to avoid sideways pressures on the finger joints. Use a **rubber finger thimble to turn pages**.
5. **Use lamp extension levers to make turning lamp switches easier**.

6. To avoid pressure on the fingers when turning a key, **use a key assist**.

HAND CONSERVATION TECHNIQUES

Avoid activities involving a tight grasp.

1. If you must do the activity, **take frequent breaks** and allow fingers to relax. If involved in craft activities such as knitting or painting, **build up the handles for a more relaxed grasp**. Also **stop every ten minutes to stretch** and straighten the fingers.
2. **Use a looser grip** – the tightness of the grip that we use is not always necessary. Possible ways to **enlarge handles on objects (pens, toothbrush, hairbrush, etc.)** are:
 - Sponge hair curlers
 - Plumbers foam pipe insulation
 - Thin foam wrapped around the handle several times, then taped
3. **Use soap-on-a-rope** to avoid holding for prolonged periods.
4. **Sew up two sides of your wash cloth to make a mitt**. This allows you to keep your fingers straight while bathing. (You can slip the soap in the mitt.)
5. **Special levers and handles attachments are available** which can be fastened to aerosol cans, door knobs, toothpaste, tubes, etc. . . .
6. **Suction cup devices** can reduce the need for a tight grasp (brushes, graters).

Avoid holding objects diagonally across; hold objects parallel to knuckles.

Reverse your hold on a **knife, holding it like a dagger** and using a **pulling action to cut**. Hold mixing spoons, broom or any other tool in this manner whenever possible.

Avoid pressure on the finger, pushing sideways, away from the thumb. Do not turn objects toward the little finger side or hold hands in that position.

1. Don't use the thumb side of your hand **to close drawers, smooth sheets, shut windows, etc.** . . . Instead, **line the palm up straight with the forearm or use the little finger side of your hand.**
2. **To turn a door knob, stand sideways, away from the thumb.** Use a door knob assist (commercially available) or secure a piece of wood to convert your **door knobs to a lever-type handle.**
3. Keep **jar lids screwed on loosely.** Keep **fingers as straight** as possible when removing jar lids. **Special jar openers** are available to minimize joint pressures.
4. **Buttons and zippers** (especially in the morning when you're stiff) can be frustrating. Try using a button hook. Zipper pulls or even a safety pin on the end of a zipper make it easier.
5. **Wringing out clothes or washcloths** can be harmful to your joints. Instead, fold the cloth in quarters and press out moisture with the palm of your hand, or stabilize cloth around faucet and twist by using wrist motion **(keeping hand aligned straight with wrist).** **Use a sponge instead of a cloth whenever possible.**

Use both hands whenever possible.

1. When lifting plates, books, water pitchers, trays, or other objects slip palms (not just fingers) of both hands under the object to lift it. Use oven mitts for any hot items.
2. To lift saucepans, lay the handle across the palm of one hand and support other side of pan with palm of other hand.

Avoid using pressure on the thumb, pushing it back. (Example: Use a tool to push in thumb tacks, use car door assist to open a car door, etc. . . .)

AVOID HOLDING JOINTS OR USING MUSCLES IN ONE POSITION FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME

This causes muscles to tire quickly. When muscles tire they don't provide the support arthritic joints needs.

- A. **Don't stand to work for prolonged periods.** If you must stand, **standing** on a **soft surface**, such as a **rug or rubber mat**, may be less fatiguing and easier on your feet. However, take a rest break and sit before your legs feel too tired.
- B. **Sit to work whenever possible.** Try using a **high stool (with a back)** instead of standing at a workbench or kitchen counter. If you sit for a long time, you may become stiff, **so change positions frequently.** Stand up every once in a while to stretch. On **driving trips, the frequent rest stops to stretch out.**
- C. **Avoid holding objects for prolonged periods of time.** Take breaks and rest your joints in proper, straight alignment. Whenever an object (such as a pen or pencil) is **not in immediate use, put it down.** Instead of holding book or cards, **use a book or card holder.**
- D. **Drive two nails through a cutting board** (about one inch apart) **to hold vegetables in place while you peel and cut them.**

DON'T START AN ACTIVITY WHICH YOU CANNOT STOP IF IT BECOMES NECESSARY.

You should be able to **stop an activity immediately if you feel** that it is **over-tiring you** or **putting strain in your joints.** The reason for this is to prevent tiring of the muscles so that the joint capsule and ligaments will not have to take the strain.

- A. **Slide or roll objects** instead of lifting them. Use a **utility cart** in the kitchen.
- B. **Avoid** very-ambitious tasks, such as **all-day projects** or **shopping trips**, duties with **time limits** or **deadlines**, volunteer jobs requiring a great amount of responsibility or with strong commitments.

PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR BODY'S SIGNALS, ESPECIALLY PAIN

- A. The body will frequently give you a **danger signal** if you place a joint under harmful stress. If **pain lasts more than two hours** after doing an activity, you've put the joint under **too much stress.** Think back and decide what you can do to **modify it the next time.**
- B. If a specific **joint** begins **to hurt or becomes swollen or warm, minimize its usage** for a time.

- C. Your doctor may recommend **splints to help support aching, swollen joints**. Splints provide support to the joints, allowing the muscles to relax and can help swelling and pain.

BE AWARE OF YOUR BODY'S NEED FOR REST

With arthritis, **doing any activity takes more effort** and energy than it would normally.

- A. When you are particularly worried or under emotional stress, your arthritis is more likely to flare up. Although the exact relationship of arthritis flare and emotional stress is not known, **worry robs you of needed rest and relaxation**.
- B. **Adequate rest is essential**. You need to rest before your tire! You may need **8-10 hours** of sleep per night. You may find that you can do more of you take **periodic short rests** during the day.
- C. Learn to **accept things you cannot change** and plan to **take extra rests** during the day to help you get through difficult periods.
- D. **Lie down** to rest and **keep your joints good alignment**.
- E. Remember that **energy conservation is more important on your good days**. On these days, you will be tempted to overdo. Remember that when muscles are fatigued, they can no longer provide the support that arthritis joints need.