



## Self-Management of Hand Arthritis: Joint Protection Techniques

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When you are participating in everyday activities, there are a few things you can do to protect your joints. It is amazing how frequently we perform tasks that cause stress to the delicate joints of our hands. It is a good idea to incorporate joint protection techniques into your daily routine to ensure the health and longevity of your joints. Individuals with arthritis are a group of people in particular that should pay to joint protection techniques/principles.

**1. RESPECT PAIN:** Pain is our body's way of telling us we are beginning to cause damage to our joints. Often, you know what type of activities cause increased pain from past experiences. There may even be pain that does not occur during the activity itself but later in the day. These are the types of activities you should either avoid or modify to limit pain.

**2. USE LARGER JOINTS OR BOTH HANDS WHEN POSSIBLE:** This will limit the amount of pain and stress that occurs in your joints from daily activities. Some Examples of this are:

A. Plastic grocery bags carried by your fingers causes undue stress to the very delicate finger joints. A better option would be carrying a paper bag with both arms close to your body or getting the cloth bags that have wider handles and can be easily carried on your forearms.

B. Your purse or briefcase can be carried with the longer strap over your shoulder instead of by your fingertips

C. Push heavy doors open with your hip, forearm, or elbow instead of with your hand. This will decrease stress to your wrist and hand.

D. Pull binders or heavy books off shelves with both hands.

E. Slide heavy pots across the table top instead of holding and lifting them by the handle.

**3. AVOID TIGHT AND/OR PROLONGED GRIP AND PINCH:** Tight or prolonged gripping and pinching will cause undue stress across arthritic joints of the hand. Examples of modifications to avoid these stressors are:

A. Use wider handled utensils, such as good grip products.

B. Use the palm of your hand when opening jars. Use dycem or a jar opening pad to assist in opening containers. Another option would be an automatic jar or can opener.

C. Switch hands or use a gentle grip when holding the steering wheel for long trips.

D. Use a larger pen when writing for extended periods of time.

**4. AVOID POSITIONS OF POSSIBLE DEFORMITY:** When gripping, tilting your wrist down toward your pinkie finger will cause stress across the wrist. Also, tasks that cause sideways forces to the fingers will cause undue stress to the finger joints.

Examples of activities that can be modified to avoid positions of deformity are as follows:

A. Use a dagger grip when you are cutting with a knife.

B. Hold large containers such as a milk container with both hands close to your body instead of by the handle.

C. When typing move from your elbows upper arms to reach keys instead of moving your wrist from side to side.

**5. AVOID REMAINING IN ONE POSITION TOO LONG:** Take breaks from monotonous tasks at least every 20 minutes. For example, if you are sewing or working with tools stop for a moment, change positions and come back to the task after your brief break.

**6. BALANCE REST WITH ACTIVITY:** When you are doing household chores be sure to plan breaks. Often, we get focused on our task and find ourselves hours later in pain because we did not take breaks which would have given our joints and muscles the rest they needed to avoid injuries and pain.

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