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GOOD HABITS FOR ARTHRITIS

KITCHEN



Dishwashing

Let the dishes soak in warm water. When the food particles are softened, wash the dishes with a large sponge or terry cloth mitt. Keep dishes immersed in water to wash them. Use both hands to lift heavier things into drainer.

Refrigerator

Add a webbing or leather strap to the handle of a magnetic refrigerator door. Slip your arm in the strap and step backwards to open the door.

Mixing

Use an electric blender or mixer, or put built-up handles on mixing utensils. Stir with shoulder motion.

Pouring

Put mixing bowl on top of a large, empty, lidless can. Tilt the bowl and pour out the contents using both hands to stabilize the bowl as necessary.

Stabilize bowl

Place a bowl on a damp cloth, rubber mat, in the dish drainer, or in the crook of your elbow to stabilize it for stirring.

Opening Cans

ALWAYS use an electric can opener. The counter type is best. If this is impossible, resort to frozen foods. A large handle knife can be used to slit paper and pry them open.

Opening jars

Use a wall jar opener (V-type or mounted beneath counter). Jars must be opened manually, use the palm of your hand to press down on the top and turn with forearm motion from inward rotation outward. After jars are opened once and you close them, re-opening should not be too difficult.

Handles

Build up small handles with electricians' tape to eliminate the need for complete closure of your fingers around small handles.

Sifter

The crank or shake types are best. Do not use the more common squeeze type—it has a spring.

Rolling pastry

Place your hands on top of the rolling pin and roll the pin with your hands open.

Lifting pans

There are two correct ways to lift pans

- Place one hand on top of the handle and grip it parallel to the knuckle. Support the
- other side of the pan with palm of your hand. Always use an oven mitt!

- Grip a saucepan by placing the palms of both hands around the sides of the pan. Use oven mitts!

In both cases, slide, rather than lift pans if possible. Try to use lightweight aluminum pans rather than cast iron or stainless steel pans.

Cleaning

Use non-stick pans when possible. Scouring saucepans with ordinary scourers often causes harmful finger pressures. Use a wire brush or stiff bristle brush on a handle.

Peeling

Bake potatoes or boil them in skins and avoid peeling if possible. Use a rotating blade peeler rather than a knife if you must peel.



Cutting vegetables

Use a spike board to hold vegetables while preparing them. A spike board can be made by placing two stainless steel nails through a wooden cutting board so that the nails are approximately 1" apart and protrude through the wood by 1/2 - 1".

Opening ring-top cans

Hold the can in one hand. Place a table spoon through the ring with the handle of the spoon directly over the opening. Push down on the handle of the spoon, breaking the vacuum and continue to push the handle until the can is open.

Knives

Use a large handle electric knife instead of the conventional type for slicing roasts, bread, poultry, etc.

Kettle or pan

If you must fill a kettle or pan with water, use a small container, filling it up and emptying it into the pan as many times as needed. Choose a tea kettle with an open top rather than a finger operated spout.

Dishes

Choose cookware and dishes carefully. Lightweight, shatter resistant dishes (whose cups have large handles) are best.

Carrying heavy objects

Push or slide objects along a table or counter instead of lifting them. If absolutely necessary to carry an item, support it from underneath with both hands. A utility cart on wheels is a lifesaver in the kitchen for transporting items from the stove, counter, table, etc. Be sure to use oven mitts for handling anything hot.

Storing dishes

Place dishes in a vertical rack to avoid lifting them. Utilize pot racks and tilt out bins. Keep small items on pegboard or nails within easy reach. Frequently used items should be stored no higher than shoulder level, and no lower than hip or thigh level when possible.

Oven

Toaster ovens instead of or in addition to conventional ovens allow moving things from counter level.

Miscellaneous

Do not stand for long periods, especially in the kitchen. Whatever your maximum standing time may be, always sit to work for a while before your legs get tired. A high stool may be useful to keep at your sink or stove. Try to get one with a footrest and a low back rest.

BEDROOM



Sheets

Use flat sheets instead of fitted, contour sheets for less strain on your hands. Fitted sheets with or without elastic corners are difficult to put on a bed, especially that last corner! Let someone else do the last corner if you must use fitted bottom sheets. Adapt the “last” corner with a Velcro closure if no one is around to help you make the bed.

Bed Making

If your bed is low, have someone add concrete blocks under the legs to raise it. A higher bed contributes less to back strain in both making the bed and getting in and out of bed. Before getting out of bed in the morning, pull up and smooth the covers as well as possible. Then make only one trip around the bed to finish the job.

Pillow Cases

Don't use pillow cases that are too snug. More strain is required to get them on.

BATHROOM



Faucets

Do not use fingers to turn a faucet. Operate faucets with your palms. Add extensions to the handles or have a new type faucet installed if you continue to have trouble.

Bathing

Use a bath sponge instead of a washcloth. This way, you'll avoid having to wring the washcloth. A sponge is also easier to hold.

Brushing Teeth

Place the toothpaste tube with the opening over the edge of the sink. Push down on the tube with your forearm or the little finger side of your hand, and squeeze some paste onto your brush.

Shampoo Hair

Wash your hair in the shower if possible. Stand with your back to the shower. Wash your hair with your fingertips, keeping your fingers slightly curved. Do not bend your fingers to excess or use knuckle action to wash your hair.

Sprays

Use both hands—one holds the can and the other presses down on the nozzle with the heel of hand. Never use your index finger to push down on the nozzle.

Combing Hair

If it is too much effort to raise your arms for this, sit and rest your elbows on the table, using the table to support your arms as you arrange your hair. An extension on the comb handle may also be helpful.

Shower and Tub

A shower, preferably from a chair or stool, is safer for you than a tub bath. A non-skid, suction mat should always be on the bottom of the tub or shower. A holding or safety bar mounted in the proper place for you is essential for safely getting in or out of the tub—even with someone standing to help you.

Toilet

An elevated toilet seat may help you to get up from the toilet. A safety bar may help too. If the lavatory is adjacent to the toilet, rest your forearm on it and push up.

EATING



Glass

Pick up a glass by grasping it between the thumb and palm of your hand without encircling fingers around it. Sometimes picking it up between the palms of both hands may be necessary.

Mug

An insulated mug that will not transmit heat to your hands is preferred over a cup. Choose one that has a long, deep handle to allow fingers to slide through the handle. Lift the mug with both hands.

Fork & Spoon

Hold handles straight across your palm instead of letting the handle rest between the thumb and index finger in the conventional manner—especially when eating at home. Build up handles or buy wooden-handled tableware. An extension can be added to the handle if reaching the mouth is a problem.

Knife

Take care in using a knife or fork for cutting—don't press down too hard! If necessary, build up handles. Hold handles straight across your palm like a dagger—not diagonally.

A metal pizza wheel can be used to cut foods at home. In a restaurant, ask that meats be cut up in the kitchen before they are served to you.

CLOTHING



Purse

Carry your purse on your forearm or use a shoulder bag. Carrying it with finger grasp adds stress to those joints. Lightweight purses are best. Sort out unnecessary items from your purse—they only give you extra weight to carry.

In selecting a purse, be sure the closure is one that you can operate easily.

Underwear

Take extreme care when buying underwear. Pulling up elastic girdles adds stress to joints. Front closing bras and zipper girdles are available.

Dresses

Select wraparound skirts and dresses or those with front closings and large buttons. Put loops on zipper tabs to make sliding them up and down easier.

Coats

Select a lightweight coat. It should be easy to put on and have large fastenings. Raglan sleeves are easier to get into than conventional straight sleeves.

Shoes

Slips on shoes are most desirable. A zipper closure is preferred over laces. Shoes should be low heeled. A long handled shoe horn may help you put on your shoes.

Slacks

Stretch polyester pants with elastic waistbands are easiest to put on. Wear your clothing as loose as possible.

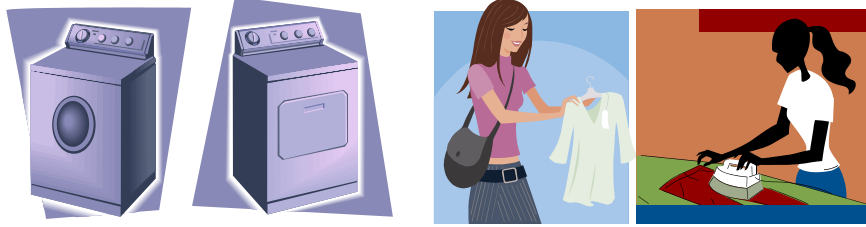
Aprons

Hoop aprons rather than tie aprons are easier to put on. Hoops are available in many fabric stores and can be slid through the top band of the apron.

Hanging Clothes

When hanging or removing clothes from a hanger, do so with the whole hand, and not just the fingers.

LAUNDRY



Washing

Have a top loading washer and dryer if at all possible. Use both hands to remove damp laundry from the washer and put it in the dryer.

If the washer knobs are difficult to turn, use an extension on them to add extra leverage.

Use a roller cart or basket to collect and move soiled laundry as well as your clean clothes.

Wringing

To wring water out of hand washing or washcloths, use one of the following methods:

- Place a light hand over hand grasp on the item. Start with elbows bent and out at the sides. Then straighten them out in front of you, maintaining the light grasp on the item. Repeat the process until dry.
- Try pressing the item between the palms of your hands or pressing the item against the sides of the sink to remove the water
- Twist the item around the faucet using a wrist motion

Clothes pins

There are no easy clothes pins to use, but the push on type is preferred over the squeeze type. Place suitable articles over the line with no clothespins.

Hanging Clothes

Be sure the clothes line is no higher than shoulder height for your convenience.

Ironing Board

Choose an adjustable ironing board which will allow you to sit on a chair or stool while ironing.

Ironing

Properly selecting clothes can eliminate the need for ironing. Polyester and permastarch rarely need anything more than a touch-up. Do not iron anything unnecessarily—this include sheets, dishtowels and underwear. Use a lightweight iron—the new ones on the market have all the features of the heavier iron. Use a heat resistant pad at the one end of the ironing board and slide the iron onto it as you rearrange the garment. It requires more effort to stand the iron on edge.

Do not iron for more than 20 minutes at a time.

MISCELLANEOUS



Resting

While sitting, place hands flat in a straight line on your thighs. If sitting in a chair with armrests, let your arms rest in the same manner on the armrests. Be sure to support your wrists. Do not sit for long periods of time with your elbows bent.

If you must support your chin on your hand, do so with the hand open, and your palm resting around your chin and cheek. Keep your wrist straight. Do not rest your chin on the backs of your fingers or against the side of your index finger.

Sleep with knees straight. Never put a pillow under your knees. Support your hands and forearms on pillows or in splints so that wrists are not dropped.

Lie on your stomach for 15 minutes each day if possible. This helps your hips.

Getting up

When getting up from a chair, open the hands and push down on the seat of the chair with the heel of your hand. Do not push with the back of the fingers or against the index finger and thumb. If sitting in an armchair, push down on the entire forearm to get up.

If getting up is extremely difficult, you may have selected the wrong chair to sit! Avoid using that chair the next time or put a cushion on the seat to raise the height.

Doorknobs

Doorknobs should be turned with the opposite hand than normally used, and in the direction of the thumb. A door extender can be of help.

Drawers

Higher drawers can be pushed closed with heels of both hands. Lower drawers can be closed with foot or leg motion, or by stepping forward.

To open drawers, slide your hand behind the knob or handle, palm toward you. Pull the arm motion rather than finger-hand motion. You may wish to replace small drawer knobs with larger ones.

Phone

Do not dial phone with fingers. Dial with a pencil held straight across your palm. Do not squeeze the pencil. See how well it rests between your thumb and little finger, actually pushing the little finger away from deformity.

Keys

Add an extension to car and household keys. This can be done by drilling a hole near the end of a 3” by ¾” flat piece of wood. Insert a small bolt through the holes in the keys and the wood, and screw on the nut. Use both hands to turn the “key holder”.

Lifting and Carrying



Lifting, handling and carrying heavy things such as full grocery bags should be avoided. If you must grocery shop alone, ask the bagger not to put so much in each bag so that you can handle

them easier when you get home. Ask that perishables and frozen foods be placed in separate bags so that you can take these in immediately when you get home, and then leave the other bags for family members or later trips.



When carrying bags, support the bag from the bottom with one forearm underneath the bag, and the other forearm encircling the bag. Hold items close to the body.

Writing

A felt tip pen requires practically no downward pressure and thus requires less grasp to hold it. Do not write for long periods of time, and no more than necessary. You may wish to build up the barrel of the pen with tape or a foam hair curler.

Sweeping

Build up the broom handle in the places where you grasp it. Limit the amount of sweeping you do. Use the lightest weight broom you can find.

Opening Windows

Push a window up or down the palms of your hands flat on the glass. If windows have a tendency to stick, run a bar of soap along the sliding track.

Cutting

Avoid using hand scissors—electric or spring loaded ones are easier to use as well as quicker.

Reading

Avoid holding onto your paper or book while reading. Instead, support the book on a book rest or prop it on a cushion, leaving your hands free.

Riding a bus



Try to sit if you can. If you have to stand and hold a pole, stand next to the pole and hold the pole in the crook of the arm.

Excess weight

Additional body weight causes great strain on your weight bearing joints. Reduce if you are overweight.

Think!!

Even on your good days, don't do more than what you have determined to be a good balance between work, recreation and rest. Don't be a martyr. Delegate responsibilities to others in the household or let nonessentials go.

Take intermittent rests during all tasks. Protect your joints early. Do not wait until you are forced to change your method of doing things, have to eliminate certain activities or use adaptive equipment and splints. Use positive measures to protect joints, to conserve energy and to preserve function from the moment you know you have arthritis.

