



Joint Protection

Joint protection is an approach that focuses on using your body in different ways to reduce the amount of stress on sore joints. Research has shown that joint protection methods can reduce pain, stiffness and flare-ups. Your hand therapist will discuss the following principles and how you can incorporate them in your daily activity.

General Principles of Joint Protection

1. Respect Pain

Pain is the body's signal that damage could occur from ongoing activity. If discomfort lasts for more than one hour after activity you should reduce, modify or avoid it.

2. Maintain muscle strength and range of motion

Specific daily exercises will help maintain range of motion and enhance muscle strength. Strengthening is best done in one specific position to avoid further strain on the joints. Your hand therapist will demonstrate these make sure you can perform them correctly.

3. Balance work and rest (pacing)

Use rest and relaxation appropriately during the day to protect the joints from the demands of further stress and pain. The amount of daily rest must be determined individually. During active inflammation of the joints more rest will be required.

4. Avoid deforming positions

Avoid positions that could lead to deformity of the joints. Proper positioning of joints during activity reduces pain and stress on the joint. Your hand therapist will show you what the strongest positions for your joints are.

5. Use stronger and joints when possible

The stresses of daily activity can be tolerated more easily by larger, stronger joints.

6. Avoid one position for long periods

When you maintain a static position muscles can fatigue and joint compression can inflame of the joint surfaces. Try to change position every 20-30minutes during activity that demands static or repetitive postures.

7. Use adaptive equipment

Certain pieces of adaptive equipment may enable you to maintain your independence while protecting your joints.

8. Conserve energy

Prioritise activities so only the most important are done. Assess the most economical way of performing the activity. Organise activity into smaller tasks to allow for others to help or to fit in breaks if pain or fatigue develops.

First Aid for painful swollen joints

1. Rest the joint with a splint, soft support or compression bandage
2. Treat swelling with ice packed on oiled skin for 10mins every 2 hours
3. Ask your hand therapist or doctor for further advice if there is no relief after 2-3days

Splinting and supports

Splinting is a useful tool to help protect your joints, manage or avoid pain, and help do more activity more comfortably

1. Resting splints can reduce pain and swelling during periods of acute inflammation
2. Night splints can hold the wrist and finger joints in good position to reduce deformity and help recovery
3. Functional splints support your joints during activity to make you stronger and reduce pain





In the garden

- Use loppers where possible instead of secateurs
- Find ergonomically designed tools, or invest in electric secateurs
- Well sharpened tools reduce the load on your hands
- Wear gardening gloves with grippy palms
- Alternate tasks to avoid lots of repetition
- Use a trowel or weed hook to avoid pinching out weeds

Around the house

- Wring out cloths by winding around a tap and use both hands to gradually twist the ends together
- Distribute weight of a package or box between both arms
- Keep your hands flat to use like paddles when lifting. Lift and push with your palms instead of your fingers
- Use lever arms on taps and keys
- Clean one room a day instead of all at once
- Alternate light and heavy activity
- Place books on a flat surface to read, on a stand or nestled into a beanbag so you don't have to hold them

General

- Use a wheatbag or warm water before or after activity
- Grip with your little and ring finger more and reduce the force in your thumb and index finger
- When using a pinch grip:
Either use the side of the index finger (like turning a key) and make sure the tip of the thumb doesn't bend backwards,
Or make a circle with tip of the thumb, index and middle fingers and maintain the circle as you grip
- Avoid vigorous or repetitive turning positions and tight gripping
- Keep your wrist straight for more strength

At work

- Use triangular or larger grips on pens and pencils
- Use a felt tip pen so you don't need to push as hard
- Reduce the force you are using to hold the pen
- Try a 'pen again'
- Look at your keyboard and mouse positions – try putting the keyboard flat to keep wrists in neutral, or use an ergonomic keyboard to reduce the rotation you need at the wrist

In the kitchen

- Use large non-slip handled utensils (OXO Good Grips)
- Use a jar key to pop the seal on new jars
- Use an electric can opener or a can key for ring-pull cans
- Hold pans with two hands
- Use cooking pots with a handle on each side
- If draining a pot place the colander in the sink or cook veges in a colander inside the pan to avoid having to strain them
- Use an ergonomic knife with an upright handle for slicing
- Slice bread by moving sideways in front of your body to reduce stress on the wrist
- Use non-slip mat to help with opening jars, bottle tops, or gripping and holding
- Leave a couple of squares in the kitchen to help with any task
- Use T shaped peelers for vegetables, or don't bother peeling! Vegeskin has lots of good fibre.
- Open a jar by using the palm of the right hand and close it by using the palm of your left
- Use a sponge instead of the dishcloth to wash dishes
- Only fill the kettle up with the amount of water you need, or place the kettle in the sink to fill it rather than holding it up
- Use the food processor to chop or dice vegetables

Where to find adaptive equipment and gadgets

- Arthritis New Zealand <https://www.arthritis.org.nz/shop/>
- Aspire Canterbury <https://shop.aspirecanterbury.org.nz/collections/daily-living>
- More Mobility <https://moremobility.co.nz/product-category/daily-living-aids/household-hobbies>
- Shops such as The Warehouse, Farmers, Briscoes, Storage Box, Mitre 10