Joint Protection for Your Hands

**Protecting the joints in your hands is important to:**
1. reduce joint stress and pain
2. reduce potential for deformity
3. make daily activities easier

**Always** use the following strategies, not just when your hands hurt:

| **Respect pain** | Ignoring pain can lead to increased pain  
“No pain no gain” is not a strategy that works well for arthritis  
Learn to distinguish “usual” vs. “not so usual” intensity of pain  
Use a pain scale: (0=no pain, 5= moderate, 10=worst pain)  
Activity resulting in increased **joint** pain and takes more than 2 hours to return to usual, should be modified or avoided |
| **Plan your activities** | Vary tasks/change hand position often  
Take frequent rest breaks – use a timer as a reminder  
Rest hands before they become tired or sore  
Spread heavier tasks throughout the week  
Alternate between hands (i.e. holding phone)  
Organize workspace to ensure wrists and hands are in a good position (i.e. when working at the computer) |
| **Use larger joints** | Carry bag on shoulder or forearm.  
Push items rather than carry them (i.e. use a wheeled cart for groceries). Pushing is easier on hands than pulling  
Carry large or heavy items with two hands close to your body.  
Close drawers/doors with your hip  
Choose automatic doors when possible  
If you have to use your hands to push up from a chair, use your **palms**. Better still, choose higher chairs or use a firm cushion to raise the seat height. |
| **Use hand splints to:** | Support wrist and finger joints in proper alignment at rest or during activity  
Reduce joint pain and inflammation  
Improve function  
**Talk to your occupational or physiotherapist to discuss what splint option(s) will best meet your needs** |
### Exercise principles

- Use heat for 10 minutes before doing hand exercises
- Add hand exercises into your daily routine, (i.e. while watching TV, listening to music, etc.)
- Start with a few repetitions and increase as tolerated.
- Quality is more important than quantity
- If hand exercises increase pain, decrease or discontinue the exercises and consult with your physiotherapist or occupational therapist

### Grip tips

- Avoid prolonged or repetitive tight gripping/squeezing
- Choose large-handled utensils/tools, or enlarge grips with foam tubing (i.e. foam pipe insulation)
- Use light weight equipment
- Use assistive devices or adapted tools (see below)

### Helpful devices:

- Non-slip material to help grip items, open jars/bottles, stabilize objects.
- Jar seal-opener (i.e. jar key)
- Electrical devices: can opener, jar opener, food chopper, etc.
- Sharp tools, knives
- Adapted kitchen aids (i.e. finger vegetable peeler, “L” shaped knife)
- Lever taps and doorknobs
- Book holder, e-reader, books on tape, headset
- Key holder/extender
- Spring-opening scissors
- Button hook, zipper pull
- Magnetic clasp (i.e. on jewellery)
- Foam steering wheel cover
- Touchpad or roller ball mouse, voice activated software

*Devices can often be found at medical supply, department, hardware and kitchen stores*

Please discuss with an Arthritis Society therapist if you have questions.