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  

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### 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.*

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