

The Principles of Joint Protection

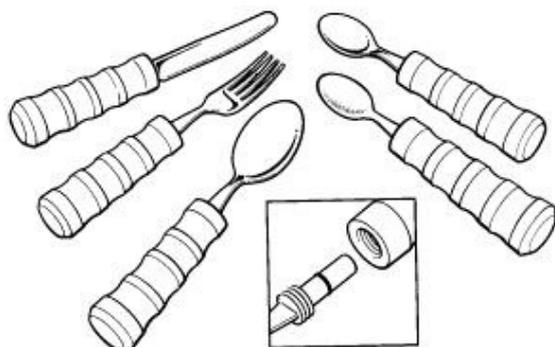
In inflammatory Arthropathy pain is a common symptom. Improper use of painful joints can lead to a decrease in hand function. Joint stiffness, pain and swelling are often common experienced symptoms in this type of condition. This is usually accompanied by a decrease in grip strength which at times can make life difficult. Below is general advice and guidance on how to protect your joints.

What to do

- Try to balance activity and rest. If possible avoid repeating an activity for a prolonged period of time. If you work in an office, alter your activity throughout the day. If your job involves typing, alternate typing with other activities such as photocopying, faxing etc. This will protect your joints by using different muscles.
- Prioritize your activity. When doing this, consider the length of time and the level of difficulty an activity can take. It can be helpful to plan specific activities for peak energy times.
- Where possible use larger and stronger joints for activities, for example use both hands to lift objects. This will help to distribute the strain over several joints. If an object is heavy use a trolley to transfer objects.



- Try to avoid tight grips. Tight grips can put strain on joints particularly the small joints of the fingers. If possible enlarging handles of everyday tools such as cutlery which will put less strain on joints and ensure the grip is more comfortable.



- Avoiding a prolonged grip can also reduce pressure on your joints. Holding a joint in the same position may cause stiffness and pain in the joint and surrounding muscles. Some activities such as writing or knitting require a prolonged and tight grip. It is important to continue the activities you enjoy however perhaps plan scheduled rest times and change activities frequently.
- Change an activity involving small finger joint. Chunky gel pens would help you with writing. Consider using a soft touch key board if you spend a lot of time typing. Use an easel if you like reading but avoid holding a book for a long period of time.
- Where possible avoid lifting or carry objects which can put excess strain on joints. Try sliding an object rather than lifting the object. Use light weight utensils and a kitchen trolley if necessary. Remember to think about your position when performing a task.



- A good sitting and standing posture can help reduce the strain on your joints. Ensure your chairs and bed provides adequate support and good positioning (Ref to diagram on the right)



- Avoid positions of deformity by using a relaxed grip. Refer to the diagram
- Regular physical activity is important to maintain muscle balance, strength and range of movement in all joints in the body. Regular exercise can assist you to avoid gaining weight and put extra strain on the larger joints such as the knees and hips. See the Sussex MSK Central website for further information including signposting to local services.
- Conserve your energy. It is important to think about the way you do jobs at home and at work. Consider re-arranging your home/work environment if necessary to enable you to avoid stooping or bending. Rest when possible and sit down if you feel tired. Try to work on surfaces below your elbow level. Use labour saving devices where possible and keep tools sharp. Share and delegate jobs. Plan your days and week to avoid periods of overload. Remember, there are not many things you should not do- it is the way in which you do them that matters.

What to do next?

If your symptoms persist or get worse please contact us on **03003038063** to organise an appointment with a clinician. You do not need to go back to your GP.

For further information about your condition and useful tips please refer to the Sussex MSK website:

<http://sussexmskpartnershipcentral.co.uk>