

Joint protection principals

Information for patients

Aim of this leaflet

Advice and information on good posture and movement during daily activities.

Joint protection principles

The following principles are designed to help you look after your joints – to protect against, or minimise the strain put on individual joints. They will decrease the pain you experience and help prevent deformity.

They are general principles, and you will need to think carefully about them in relation to all the things you do in your daily life. More specific advice will be given by your therapist regarding your situation at home or work.

There are not many activities you must avoid. However, if you can't avoid them, it is the way you do things that matters!

Find the balance between activity and rest

Prolonged activity can lead to pain and joint damage; whilst prolonged rest can lead to stiffness of muscles and joints.

Distribute the strain over several joints

Use both hands to carry/pick up objects.

Use larger joints rather than smaller ones

E.g. Carry shopping bags with handle looped over forearm, rather than held in hand.

Avoid tight grip

This puts a lot of strain on joints. By making handles larger, less force is required. E.g. Use large handles or padded cutlery, utensils and pens.

Avoid prolonged grip

Holding a joint in the same position may cause stiffness in the joint and pain in the surrounding muscles. Rest frequently when doing activities such as knitting and writing.

Change activity from one group of joints to another at regular intervals

E.g. After writing a letter, which uses the small finger joints, change to dusting, which uses larger joints.

Avoid friction and strain on the joints

Try not to carry heavy objects. Slide them along work surfaces, use lightweight objects, or use a trolley. Avoid twisting movements of the joints. Use assistive devices where possible.

Avoid positions of deformity

Be mindful of postures that may lead to joint deformity and actively encourage more natural positions.

E.g. Pushing the fingers towards the little finger. Try to work both hands towards the mid-line and use both hands. This can be done by opening jars and taps with one hand and closing with the other.

Use joints in their most stable position

Prioritise positions that put less stress on joints, such as using a flat hand grip rather than a clenched fist.

Do general exercise daily

Your therapist will give you exercises to maintain muscle strength and joint movement. Continue these even when you feel well.

Wear your splints

Do wear splints if provided. Get your therapist to check them if they are causing any problems.

Conserve energy

Think carefully about your home or workplace, to eliminate unnecessary work. Arrange all tasks within reach, to avoid stretching, stooping and walking. Maintain good sitting and standing posture. Sit when possible. Use labour saving devices where possible and keep knives and utensils sharp.

Respect pain

Pay attention to pain signals and stop activities when pain starts or worsens. Pace yourself with any task that you need to do for a prolonged period and take frequent breaks, allowing the joint to rest.

https://youtu.be/ikUzvSph7Z4?si=b-QZtpbLLS_gJw5T

https://youtu.be/C_3phB93rvI?si=-99Xts3uTCQgGU2T

Author: Hand Injury Unit © October 2024
All rights reserved
Hounslow Community Healthcare NHS Trust.

Review date: October 2026