



Protecting Your Joints From Arthritis



JOINT PROTECTION

Overuse and abuse of arthritic joints may lead to progressive deterioration of the joint and its surrounding tissue. Positive action is necessary to protect joints, conserve energy, and preserve function.

During activity a normal joint is protected by the muscles around it that absorb forces in the joint preventing undue strain on the tendons, ligaments and cartilage. A diseased joint is mechanically weak and poorly stabilized which can contribute to the overstretching of the tendons and ligaments and damage to the cartilage. This increased stress can increase the destruction of the joint and cause increased pain.

HOW CAN JOINTS BE PROTECTED?

The main idea in joint protection is to minimize the strain on joints in daily activities. Joint protection techniques try to reduce the forces on the joint to slow down the joint damage. Good posture and positioning, changing the method of an activity, and pacing all help to protect the joint.

WHICH JOINTS NEED PROTECTION?

People with a local type of arthritis, like osteoarthritis, need to pay close attention to the joints that are involved with the arthritis. People with a systemic or whole-body type of arthritis, like rheumatoid arthritis, need to reduce the stress on all their joints.

When planning your joint protection, start by concentrating on the joints that are currently giving you the most trouble. Check the principles that apply most strongly to you in the list below. Make a list of several examples of how you can apply that principle to your problem joints.

JOINT PROTECTION PRINCIPLES

1. Respect Pain.

- a. It is important to distinguish between discomfort and pain.
- b. Pain that lasts longer than 1-2 hours after an activity indicates that the activity is too stressful and needs to be modified.
- c. If there is a sharp increase in pain during an activity stop and rest, then modify the activity.

If there is unusual pain or stiffness the next day, look back at the previous day's activities to see if they were too strenuous..

2. *Avoid Positions of Deformity*-**the foremost position of deformity for most joints is flexion or bending of the joint. Maintaining a bent position increases the possibility of deformity.**

- a. Stand erect with your weight evenly divided on both feet.
 - b. Lie with your body flat in bed, do not curl up or prop yourself on several pillows.
 - c. Work with your hands flat.
- Avoid a tight grip or squeezing.

3. *Avoid Awkward Positions*-**use each joint in its most stable and functional position. Extra strain is placed on a joint when it is twisted or rotated.**

- a. Scoot forward and rise straight up from sitting, rather than leaning to one side for support.
 - b. Reposition your feet rather than twisting your trunk or knees.
 - c. Stand on a stool to reach overhead.
 - d. Reposition yourself closer to an object rather than stretching your reach.
 - e. Sit down to clean or garden, rather than squatting or kneeling down.
- Always use good posture when standing, sitting or lying down.

4. *Use Your Strongest Joints or Distribute the Forces Between Several Joints*-**the stress on each individual joint is less if it is divided over several joints. The larger joints have greater muscles surrounding them to absorb the stress.**

- a. Use two hands whenever possible.
 - b. Carry packages in both arms rather than in one.
 - c. Carry a shoulder bag or purse handle over your forearm rather than in your fingers.
- Use a knapsack to carry packages on your back.

- a. Lift objects from underneath using wrists and elbows rather than pinch gripping the sides.
 - b. Lift objects with your knees bent and your back straight.
 - c. Move large objects by pushing rather than pulling.
- Push with an open palm or the forearm rather than the fingers.

2. *Use Adapted Equipment*-**find equipment that will reduce the stress on the joint or make the job easier.**

Equipment can be modified by:

- Building up the handle so it is easier to grasp.
- Extending the handle so it is easier to reach.

Available equipment includes:

- Walking aids.
- Self-care aids.
- Bathroom safety.
- Homemaking equipment.
- Job modification equipment

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