

Information and Advice about Reducing Pain and Protecting Your Joints



The Pulvertaft Hand Centre
within the Royal Derby Hospital

01332 787290



Osteoarthritis

You have been given this booklet because you have pain or discomfort in one or more of your joints.

Osteoarthritis is a common cause of joint pain effecting 20% of the general population aged over 55 years.

Osteoarthritis can affect many aspects of your everyday life. This booklet has been designed with the help of clinicians in response to questions asked by patients with Osteoarthritis including advice about how to carry on with your normal life as much as possible whilst reducing pain and protecting your joints from further damage.

This booklet contains information on the following:

1. What is Osteoarthritis?
2. Protecting your joints
3. Dealing with fatigue
4. Diet
5. Holistic Medicine

What is Osteoarthritis?

A 'normal' joint is where two or more bones meet. The joint allows the bones to move freely but within limits.

Osteoarthritis is a disease that affects the body's joints. The surfaces within the joint are damaged so the joint does not move as smoothly as it should. The main symptoms are pain and sometimes stiffness.

When a joint develops Osteoarthritis, some of the cartilage covering the ends of the bones gradually roughens and becomes thin and the bone underneath thickens. All the tissues within the joint become more active than normal, as if the body is trying to repair the damage.

Sometimes the body's repairs are quite successful and the changes inside the joint will not cause much pain. If the Osteoarthritis becomes severe, the cartilage can become so thin that it no longer covers the ends of the bones. The bones start to rub against each other and eventually can start to wear away. The loss of cartilage, the wearing of bone and sometimes bony spurs can alter the shape of the joint, forcing the bones out of their normal alignment.



Protecting your joints

Joint protection can reduce joint damage, preserve range of motion, and lessen Osteoarthritis pain by reducing the general stress and strain on the joint. Making changes early can help avoid joint problems becoming worse in the future.

Become more aware of how you use the joints that ache, both at home and at work. For example, try watching your actions while you use your hands – for example when you make a hot drink:

- What is happening to your fingers while you are turning the tap? Are they being pushed towards the little finger?
- What happens to your thumbs as you take the lid of the coffee jar? Is there pressure or aching at the base of your thumb?
- What is happening to your wrist and fingers as you lift the kettle? Can you feel aching or pulling at these joints?

You might already have tried picking up the kettle with two hands when your hands are painful, but it is important to do this **all the time**, not just when your hands are hurting. This is an example of **joint protection**.

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The following principles may help you:

Respect pain. If you are experiencing pain after an activity, you must consider that you have been too active or have done too much.

Pace your activities throughout the day. Spread physically hard jobs, such as housework or mowing the lawn, at intervals through the day, rather than tackling them all at once.

Avoid any activity that causes pain and find a better way of accomplishing the task. Avoid a tight grip that strains joints and muscles. Avoid a prolonged or continuous grip. Small joints can take little weight, so gripping a pen or cutlery can be hard work. Holding a larger object involves more joints, so it spreads the grip. Picking up an object with two hands halves the load on each hand.



Make handles larger with padding, for example, sponge tubing for pipe lagging. A solid surface is harder to grip than a soft surface, also a larger surface area means less strain. Wear padded gloves when gardening.

Use adaptive devices. There are many devices available on the market to make it easier for you to carry out everyday tasks.

Below are examples of some which may make your life easier and reduce the stress on your thumb joint:

Spring loaded scissors reduce the load on your thumbs.



Jar Keys can really make a difference as they break the vacuum when opening jars.



L-shaped knives do not use the thumb at all.



Ring pull can openers like a 'magi pull' available from Lakeland can make opening cans easier.

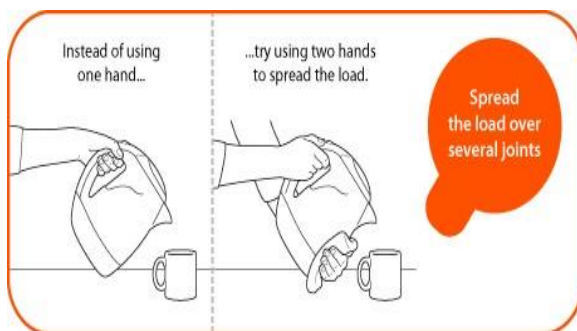


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As we age, the natural stickiness of our hands decreases and our hands become drier, this can lead us to have to use 20% more grip strength to open jars etc. Using rubber gloves or sticky matting underneath and on the lid of a jar can reduce the amount of grip strength you need to use.

- **When straining vegetables**, instead of lifting and tipping the pan, place vegetables in a wire basket in the pan to cook. When ready, they can be lifted and drained in the basket. Leave the saucepan to cool before moving it.
- **When using the kettle**, use a plastic jug to fill the kettle from the tap and only fill the kettle up as required. A kettle tipper can be used, or a small lightweight travel kettle. Also, kettles with the handle over the top have been reported to be easier to lift using two hands rather than the kettles with the handle on the side.



Dealing with fatigue

At times people with arthritis may experience fatigue. Fatigue is a feeling of weariness, but it is more extreme than simple tiredness. It can affect you physically, making your limbs seem heavy and causing you to feel exhausted, but it can also affect your concentration and motivation. People who experience fatigue may find they struggle to do even small tasks. It often comes on for no apparent reason and without warning.

There are many things that can cause fatigue including those listed below:

- Anaemia, which often accompanies inflammation.
- Other long-term conditions such as diabetes or thyroid disease.

- Some drugs used to treat arthritis which may cause drowsiness or loss of concentration.
- Pain, especially if it is long term weak muscles, which mean you have to use more energy to do everyday tasks.
- Overdoing things or carrying on with activities for too long.
- Sleep disturbances as a result of pain, late nights or sleeping too much in the day.
- Stress and anxiety.
- Low mood or depression.
- Poor diet or hunger.

What can you do to help yourself?

- Talk to your GP or Rheumatology team about getting support or a review of your medication.
- Use the four 'Ps' – Problem Solving, Planning, Prioritising and Pacing.
- Tell family, friends and colleagues about your fatigue so that they can understand and help if needed.
- Gradually increase your physical exercise. This will improve your general well-being, strength and energy levels.
- Deal with stress or anxiety.
- Talk to your GP if you have low mood.
- Improve your sleeping habits.
- Eat a healthy diet.

Diet

Whilst it is not the cause of Osteoarthritis and thumb base pain, being overweight can affect your health in many ways. If you are overweight then losing weight will help reduce the strain on your joints, increase your sense of well-being and reduce your risk of other health problems.

Apart from reducing sugar and fat, taking regular exercise, and ensuring that you have your five a day of fruit and vegetables, it has been shown that increasing your intake of vitamins and minerals, particularly Calcium, Vitamin D and Iron, eating less saturated fat and incorporating more good fats in your diet such as Omega 3 can improve symptoms of Arthritis.

See table below for a list of good and bad fats.

Saturated Fats (Bad fats) - <i>avoid</i>
Full fat dairy products
Processed foods (cakes, biscuits, pastries)
Chips, if fried in animal fat.
Foods cooked using ghee (clarified butter)
Polyunsaturated Fats (Fats that can increase inflammation) - <i>avoid</i>
Softer fats and oils
Corn or sunflower sources of oil
Monounsaturated Fats (Neutral fats but contain a high amount of calories) - <i>Limit Your Intake</i>
Olive oil
Rapeseed oil

Omega-3 Polyunsaturated Fatty Acids

These are important to keep in your diet. Omega-3 has been found to be of benefit to people with Arthritis. It can be found in free range eggs, oily fish and fish oil supplements. The table below shows a list of some oily fish which you should aim to eat at least twice a week, but no more than four times a week:

Oily Fish	
Anchovies	Mackerel
Kippers	Sprats
Herring	Pilchards
Trout	Whitebait
Eel	Sardines
Swordfish	Salmon
Fresh Tuna (not tinned)	

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Supplements

There are a range of supplements you can purchase that have been shown to have some effect on pain and inflammation caused by arthritis, these include Fish Oils (not to be confused with fish liver oil), Vitamin D, Calcium, Iron, Vitamin E in the form of wheatgerm, sunflower seeds, nuts and avocado and Glucosamine (check with your GP before taking if you have diabetes). People take glucosamine and/or chondroitin because it may nourish damaged cartilage, but research results are mixed. If you are thinking of taking glucosamine, it is suggested you take 1500 mg per day of glucosamine sulphate for 3 months.

Supplements are a good way to boost your intake of these beneficial substances, but they should not be used in place of a healthy diet.

Holistic Medicine

Many people who have Arthritis find benefit in using some forms of complimentary or alternative medicine alongside their usual medication.

It is important that **you always discuss any complementary or alternative medicine with your GP** or the Rheumatology team before embarking on a treatment.

There are many alternatives to mainstream medicine that may be of benefit to people with arthritis, these include:

- Acupuncture
- The Alexander technique
- Aromatherapy
- Copper and magnetic bracelets
- Herbal medicine
- Massage
- Relaxation, hypnosis, and meditation
- Collagen
- Cognitive therapies

Holistic medicine incorporating techniques such as these are generally safe but ensure that your therapist is legally registered before starting any treatment. There is a lot more information on these general techniques and treatments on the Versus Arthritis website (<http://www.versusarthritis.org/>).



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(Edits were to update information on diet as per Versus Arthritis website)

Additional information can be obtained from the Versus Arthritis UK website (<http://www.versusarthritis.org/>)



Notes: