

WHAT'S NEW



Helping Arthritis Sufferers

Dr Wong Sweet Fun, Senior Consultant
Department of Geriatric Medicine, Alexandra Hospital

Fatigue and the improper use of the joints can worsen arthritis leading to pain, inflammation, weakness and joint destruction. Patient education in **energy conservation** and **joint protection** help them to manage their own arthritis, prevent or delay progression, giving them a sense of control over their body and therefore alleviating anxiety and depression. Studies have shown that arthritis sufferers, using these techniques throughout their day, reported less pain and fatigue during their daily activities, associated with an increase in their ability to carry out all work, self-care and leisure activities.

Energy Conservation

Energy conservation training teaches people to use their energy wisely to reduce muscle fatigue. General energy conservation strategies involve eliminating unnecessary tasks, combining necessary tasks, rearranging the sequence of tasks, and simplifying the tasks as much as possible. Other general tips include:

- Sit whenever possible so that the body does not have to work against gravity.
- Whenever possible, push or slide objects across a surface instead of carrying them.
- Avoid holding objects in a static position for long periods as it encourages muscle fatigue.
- Use large muscle groups and both hands when completing tasks as often as possible.
- Organise daily routines for efficient performance. Spread out activities evenly throughout the day.
- Work in a well-lit and cool room to prevent additional strain on the eyes and muscles.
- Organise work centres so that all of the necessary equipment is within easy reach.

Joint Protection

Joint protection involves a series of principles that reduce the amount of stress put on the joints. General joint protection strategies include the following:

Be mindful how you use your hands.

You can perform most tasks in easier ways that put less deforming forces on your joints.

1. Avoid positions that push your other fingers toward your little finger. Finger motions should be in the direction of your thumb whenever possible.
 - Substitute typing for writing whenever possible. Writing puts pressure on the fingers and encourages them to move towards the little finger.
2. Avoid making a tight fist and holding objects with a small tight grasp.
 - Use thick handles or build up the handle on the objects (with a towel or foam), which make them easier to hold.
3. Avoid pinching items between your thumb and your fingers.
 - Hold a book, plate or mug in the palms of both hands to lighten the load and to distribute the weight across many joints. If you're reading for long periods, use a book holder.

To view a slide show on Joint protection for people with hand arthritis, go to "<http://health.yahoo.com/arthritis-living/slide-show-joint-protection-for-people-with-hand-arthritis/mayoclinic-55609D76-3CDE-46D9-86B8AE68C63EE763.html>"

