

FURTHER INFORMATION

Try not to worry, help is available. You can speak to your GP or nurse and you can ask for a referral to occupational therapy and physiotherapy. A review of your hand problem may be recommended by your health care practitioner. Keep busy, keep active, join social groups and activities and talk with others about how you are feeling.



Joint protection does not mean you should stop using your hands, it means finding ways to use them differently

- For more information on OA and a link to NHS professional bodies, see the Keele University OA Guidebook www.arthritisresearchuk.org/arthritis-information/keele-oa-guide.aspx
- Arthritis Research UK www.arthritisresearchuk.org
- Arthritis Research UK's Keep Moving booklet www.arthritisresearchuk.org/~media/Files/Arthritis-information/Living-with-arthritis/2282-Keep-moving-inc-poster.ashx
- NHS Choices www.nhs.uk
- National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines for osteoarthritis www.nice.org.uk/guidance/CG177/ifp/chapter/About-this-information
- The Handbook of Non-Drug interventions (HANDI) Joint Protection Strategies www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/guidelines/handi/interventions/musculoskeletal/joint-protection-strategies-for-hand-osteoarthritis/
- Keele University Arthritis Research UK Primary Care Centre SMOOTH study—Dziedzic K, Nicholls E, Hill S, et al. Self-management approaches for osteoarthritis in the hand: a 2x2 factorial randomised trial. *Ann Rheum Dis.* 2015 Jan;74(1):108-18.
- Oppong R, Jowett S, Nicholls E, et al. Joint protection and hand exercises for hand osteoarthritis: an economic evaluation comparing methods for the analysis of factorial trials. *Rheumatology (Oxford).* 2015 May;54(5):876-83.

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OSTEOARTHRITIS OF THE HAND



If you have Hand Osteoarthritis you may have some worries and questions, but there are plenty of things you can do and practical steps to help you manage your symptoms. This leaflet will answer the following questions:

- What is hand osteoarthritis?
- What changes can I make and what help is available to me?
- How can I help myself, protect my joints and reduce pain in my hands?

Osteoarthritis (OA) is a condition which causes joint pains and is thought to affect about 1 in 4 people aged 50 years and over. It can be diagnosed clinically, without an x-ray.

It can make things you are used to doing more difficult and painful, and it can change the structure of the joints. Hand OA often coexists with other conditions, such as carpal tunnel syndrome and trigger finger, but no-one knows exactly why some people get OA in their hands and others don't.

There is evidence to say that repetitive hand movements over time and previous hand injuries may make a person more likely to develop symptoms.

Risk factors include: Being overweight; Being over 40 years old; Being female; Having a family history of OA.

Joint pain occurs frequently in both hands but the pattern of pain and signs of OA can affect each person differently and each hand differently. However the location of finger nodes (swellings) is often similar. There are treatments available and lifestyle changes you can make to the way you use your hands and undertake daily activities to help ease pain and symptoms.

It is NOT caused by ageing and it does NOT necessarily get worse over time.



MAKING SMALL CHANGES - THE 6 P'S

Small changes can make a BIG difference. Being more aware of how you use your hands in everyday activities helps to identify which movements particularly contribute to pain, aching and joint difficulties.

Pain

Make a note of your pain and which activities or movements make it worse or better. Don't ignore it, try to make changes using the 'practical tips' on the next page.

Protection

Try to reduce joint strain by adapting lifting, pushing and twisting movements. Think about how you can use your joints differently, e.g. use a tray to carry cups to spread the load, use gadgets to help, use two hands instead of one. When doing DIY or gardening, grip handles less tightly.

It may help you to try and to use your palm and fingers only, keeping the thumb out of the way.

Problem Solving

Analyse problems and identify possible causes. Identify a range of possible solutions and try these solutions in turn to see which work best for you. Try using stronger and larger joints for activities, e.g. hips to push open doors. Look for help and support if you're having difficulties at work. Speak to your manager for advice and guidance. Take more frequent breaks, consider moving to an area of work where you don't use your hands as much.

Positioning

Change your hand position regularly and try to reduce repetitive movements. Be aware of the position of your hands when doing everyday activities and check you are not over stretching. Think about what happens to your fingers when you turn a tap on or open a jar. Are they twisted into a painful position? Can you think of other ways to do these things?

Pacing

Take regular, short 'microbreaks' to stretch your joints. Save your energy by planning activities and swap between tasks to change position. Avoid peaks and troughs, and build up your activity levels slowly. Even out heavier and lighter jobs throughout the day and the week.

Planning

Be more active when you have less or no pain and try to avoid certain jobs when you have pain. If you can, organise tasks more efficiently by breaking jobs up into smaller tasks, or spread tasks out over a longer period. Remember to take breaks, try to avoid buying clothes with lots of buttons and buy plastic mugs if glass ones are too heavy. It may help you to find out what is going on 'under your skin,' by learning more about your condition you could help yourself to better manage it. Remember, a joint can remodel itself. Arthritis is wear and repair NOT wear and tear.

PROTECTING YOUR JOINTS

Practical hints and tips to look after your hands

How to make things easier

There are strategies you can employ and equipment you can use to make everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning, dressing and washing a bit easier. Remember, it is making the change and putting ideas into practice which is important. Your aim is to change as many movements as possible which cause pain and take an active role in your own health care.



General advice to make things easier could include:

- Distributing the weight of what you lift over several joints, for example spreading the load between two hands.
- Avoiding putting strain on the thumb and repetitive thumb movements
- Avoiding prolonged grips and using as large a grip as possible

Try to reduce the effort needed to do a task by:

- Using labour saving gadgets or a different design of equipment
- Avoiding lifting heavy objects – find another way to move or slide an object instead, or reduce the weight of what you lift

PAIN Remember that pain can be physical (from injury), emotional (from stress, worry) and environmental (temperature, comfort).

EXERCISES You can improve your grip, improve your hand strength and help your hand pain. Stress balls, thumb flexing, using playdough and doing flexibility exercises in warm water, e.g. the bath or the sink, can all be useful. Make sure you avoid straining your joints and remember to keep them as mobile as possible!



ADAPTATIONS There are lots of different ways to adapt the way you use everyday objects. For example, using the palm of your hand to turn a tap, supporting plates and mugs with both hands, or closing drawers with your hip or palm of hand. There are also various gadgets you can buy to help you around the house – electric can openers, tap turners, jar openers, kettle tippers and adapted plugs are some examples—speak to an occupational therapist for advice.

PACING Think ahead. Frequent short rest breaks actually help to increase your level of activity. Think of your energy stores as a battery – regular short rests help recharge this, so you don't rundown too quickly.