

Arthritis NSW

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Arthritis NSW acknowledges the assistance of Nadine Morkos, Occupational Therapist in the production of this document.

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HAND EXERCISES

MUSCLE AND JOINT PAIN THAT COMES ON AFTER ACTIVITY AND LASTS MORE THAN TWO HOURS MEANS YOU MAY HAVE DONE TOO MUCH, TOO QUICKLY. DO IT LESS VIGOROUSLY OR DO IT FOR LESS TIME THE NEXT DAY. IF IT CONTINUES TO BE A PROBLEM, SEEK MEDICAL ADVICE.

Hand exercises may help to reduce stiffness, improve muscle strength and joint range of motion in people who have arthritis. There is no one-size-fits-all hand prescription for people with arthritis, but an occupational therapist, physiotherapist or rheumatologist can help design a program especially for your hands.

REST/EXERCISE BALANCE

If you have arthritis you must find the right balance between exercise and rest. Rest is often needed to settle inflamed joints, but too much rest will weaken muscles and increase stiffness.

Use these principles as a guide:

When joints are inflamed, rest is needed for that joint. The amount and type will depend on how inflamed your joints are.

Rest does not always mean lying down – it can also mean changing your posture, wearing your splint or doing a different activity.

Avoid the movements that cause joint pain. Jar openers, tap turners and other adaptive equipment may help to alleviate stress on joints during daily activities.

Stiff joints need more exercise.

Joints that are weak and unstable require more support. Splints are worn to protect painful joints during certain activities. An occupational therapist can advise whether hand splints will be useful for you.

The following exercise program is worked out to involve every joint and muscle in your hands.

IMPORTANT POINTS:

Do at least 5 repetitions of each exercise 2 – 3 times daily.

Perform each exercise SLOWLY, bending and stretching as far as possible within pain limits.

Relax your hand and posture during the exercises.

Do not exercise a joint if it is hot, red, swollen and painful. This means the joint is inflamed and should be rested and moved gently within pain limits.

Doing these exercises in warm water can be helpful.

Refer to the Arthritis Australia 'Hands and arthritis' and 'Saving energy' fact sheets for additional information.



1 MAKING A HOOK FIST

Start with fingers and knuckles straight, bend middle and ring joints. Do not bend large knuckles. The movement is similar to carrying a plastic bag.



2 MAKING A FULL FIST

Starting with your fingers straight, bend all of your joints to make a fist. Return to the start position.



3 WRIST EXTENSION AND FLEXION

Start with your forearm on a table and your wrist over the table edge. Lift your hand while keeping your fingers relaxed. Hold for 3 seconds. Return gently to the start position.



4 THUMB FLEXION

Bend your thumb to touch the base of the little finger, keeping the tip joint straight. Return to the start position.



5 THUMB ADDUCTION & ABDUCTION

Move the thumb down and away from the palm. Move back to rest along the palm.



6 THUMB OPPOSITION

Touch the tip of the thumb to the nail tip of each finger in turn, making an 'O' shape.



7 FINGER ABDUCTION & ADDUCTION

With your hand flat on a table, spread all of your fingers apart. Bring them back together as close as possible.



8 FOREARM SUPINATION

Start with forearm on the table, with your thumb up and your elbow held at your side. Turn palm upward as far as possible. Hold for 3 seconds and then return to the start position.