Tips to Alleviate Stress on Your Finger Joints and Wrists

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Ways to Improve Grip Strength

Most people don't think twice about brushing their teeth or starting their car, but for someone with Rheumatoid Arthritis, those simple maneuvers are achingly difficult. The act of grabbing, clutching or pinching is particularly painful since the fingers, knuckles and wrists often bear the brunt of arthritis inflammation. Luckily there are ways to soften the blow, and rehabilitation exercises to improve your gripping comfort and ability.

Good Tools for a Better Grip

Depending on your particular case and the extent of your RA, a couple of simple modifications might do the trick or else you may need to revamp all of your hand-held accessories. In any case, focus on three areas: softening the surface, easing the pressure, or eliminating the problematic movement.

- **Improvise with household items.** Cheap foam hair rollers can help make a great DIY arthritis pen as well as making utensil handles softer and more comfortable. A shower mitt can help you clean dishes without resorting to fiddly scrubbers. Get creative with some soft materials that you can wrap around hard surfaces that you need to use regularly, and you will likely notice a difference in your hands and fingers.
- **Good universal gripping tools.** Instead of suffering through the pain or investing in a variety of specific tools, find a grip aid that works well for a lot of different motions. Look for a handle made of plastic or other durable material, fitted with a Velcro strip: after attaching the corresponding Velcro strips to your phone, brush, remote control, favorite mug – anything you use often – the universal handle will grab the item firmly without forcing you to tighten your hand around it.
- **Clever grip aids for specific tasks.** Outfitting your entire household with Velcro strips isn't always practical, and for certain tasks, you'll want something a bit more fine-tuned. Small accessories that require dexterity can be modified with simple additions. Simple levers can be attached to doorknobs, specialty handles can steady keys in your hand, and plastic clips can keep books open and pages turning.

Building Grip Strength and Comfort

RA will progress for many people, but there are ways to halt or slow the immobilization of certain joints. When it comes to your wrists and hands, some specific strengthening exercises have returned promising results:

Workout on machines. Strength training is good for RA in general, since stronger muscles will help to stabilize joints and take some of the pressure off. However, patients that exercise on a machine circuit not only get a full body workout, but studies have shown they also build their finger and muscle strength by routinely gripping the handles of the equipment.

Practice yoga. Yoga is great for improving range of motion, strength and flexibility, but it has also been shown to improve grip strength in those with RA, especially adult female patients. As with weight machines, a yoga session involves repetitive movements, and poses that involve bracing or holding may help to gently build important hand

and wrist stabilizer muscles.

Commit to hand training. Studies have shown that repeating certain hand exercises over 12 weeks with the help of soft resistance can greatly improve grip strength. By squeezing, rolling and stretching therapeutic putty, you will soon be able to extend and contract your hand muscles more powerfully.

There are a range of clever devices for RA patients, and rehabilitation studies are ongoing. However, don’t underestimate the power of your daily routine: learning to perform tasks a bit differently, switching up the order of activities, or taking more rest when you need it can have lasting effects on your physical ability.