
Living well with arthritis

Is arthritis affecting the way you live?

One day, you awaken with a painful knee, a stiff shoulder, a swollen foot. Walking to the bathroom and stepping into the tub safely is a physical challenge. Simple tasks that you do during the day result in sharp pain followed by a dull ache which lasts the rest of the day.

Often pain, fatigue, and stiffness can interfere with your ability to perform daily chores and participate in the activities you enjoy.

Occupational therapists can assist you in controlling pain and swelling and doing more!

Occupational therapists can help you with your 'Skills for the job of living' – finding better, easier ways to perform all your day-to-day activities. Occupational therapists can assist you in controlling pain and swelling in your joints, protecting your joints from damage, managing stress and fatigue and obtaining special assistive devices. Whether you're dressing, cooking, driving, working, doing housework, gardening or doing something you love to do, here are a few Skills for the job of living tips to assist you each and every day:

Use better body mechanics:

- Use large surface areas or strong joints to reduce stress. Use the palms of your hands, forearms, or elbows instead of your fingers (e.g. to avoid gripping a handle with your hands, use a bag with a shoulder strap).
- Avoid lifting heavy loads. Slide objects or use a wheeled cart instead of lifting them.

- When grasping a mug, use both hands to encircle the cup instead of placing your fingers through the handle.
- Change positions frequently to stretch out your joints. Avoid staying in one position for too long.
- Maintain a healthy weight and use proper posture to gain the most from your muscles and joints.

Organize your daily tasks:

- Make a list to determine which tasks need to be accomplished each week.
- Decide what tasks are absolutely necessary, and how they can be simplified. Eliminate any unnecessary tasks.
- Decide when the task is best done (pain and fatigue will vary throughout the day).
- Store frequently used items in your home or workplace at a level between the eye and hip for easier access. Heavier items should be stored at waist level. Use aids, appliances and utensils. They will place less stress on painful joints.
- Install a jar opener instead of using your hands to twist off a lid.
- Replace round door knobs and sink faucets with more easily operated levers.
- Ensure appliances have levers or push buttons that are easy to use.
- Choose utensils with larger handles or surfaces.
- Relax your grip on objects by enlarging handles on items you use frequently such as pens, knives, etc. or by using a different

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approach (e.g. scrubbers that fit over your hand like a mitt for washing dishes instead of tightly grasping a dish rag).

Cooking tips:

- Use lightweight bowls, dishes and cooking utensils rather than heavy pots and pans, or ceramic bowls.
- Spray a non-stick product on baking tins and pans, or use non-stick surfaces to decrease cleaning required later.
- To minimize clean-up, cook one-pot meals or serve food in the containers it was cooked in.
- Prepare large portions so you can freeze extra portions.

Conserve energy / relax

- Use your energy wisely. Pace yourself. Schedule rest breaks throughout the day. Alternate work with short, frequent rest breaks.
- Ask an occupational therapist about relaxation techniques, ways to save energy and ways to increase your endurance for the things that you want to do.

Occupational therapists can help you with your Skills for the job of living. By teaching you how to reduce stress in painful joints, everyday activities can be done with greater ease and less discomfort.

Finding an occupational therapist to help at home

Occupational therapy services for home-related problems can be accessed through many methods, including:

- Home Care programs through your regional health authority
- Extended health benefits with some insurers
- Veterans Affairs for eligible veterans
- Clients purchasing services directly from an occupational therapist

To find an occupational therapist go to our website at www.saot.ca and download the Private Practice Listing. Or for an occupational therapist employed by a regional health authority, phone Health Link, or go to the Inform Alberta website (www.informalberta.ca).

Adapted from:

Arthritis by Sandra Lee, BScOT, OT(C) and Arthritis Month by Donna Franz, BScOT

References:

Lorig and Fries, The Arthritis Handbook & AOTA, 'Occupational Therapy is important when you are living with Arthritis brochure.



Occupational therapy assists you with the Skills for the job of living in caring for yourself and your family, in returning to work, and in resuming community activities.

For additional information of the benefits of occupational therapy and how it can assist you or someone you know, please contact:

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www.saot.ca or www.otworks.com