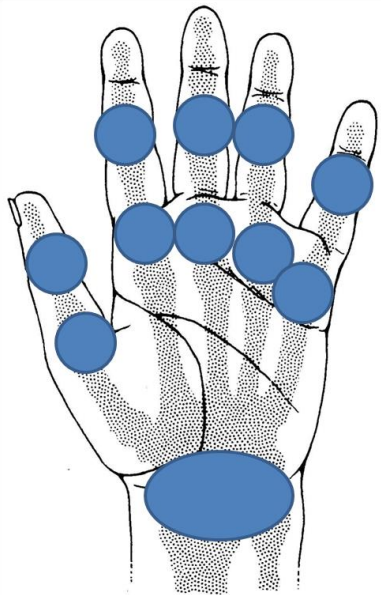


Inflammatory Arthritis and Your Hands

Joints at Risk



Inflammatory arthritis affects the wrist and many small joints in the hands. Joints can be swollen, painful, hot and red. Many common activities put strain on the joints that can worsen your symptoms.

By using some simple techniques to reduce the strain on hands and by keeping your muscles strong, you can:

- Decrease your pain
- Make activities easier to do
- Help keep your joints working well

How to reduce the strain on your joints:

Respect Pain

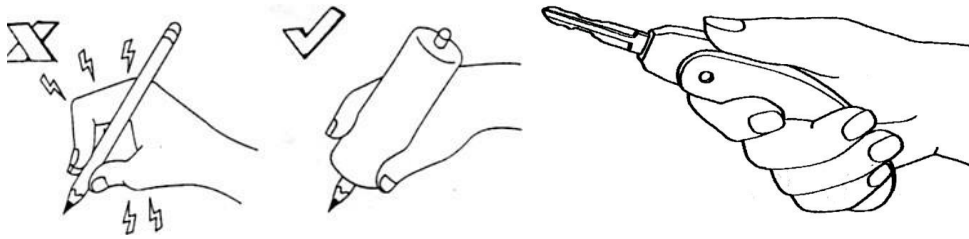
- Pain is a useful signal. It may be a signal that you need to change the position you are using to do an activity or you need to take a break.
- Some pain while doing an activity is okay provided it is not a lot worse than usual. Ask yourself: “Am I safe?” to continue doing this activity, and “Will I be OK later?”
- Learn what your pain means to you.
- If you have a time of day when you usually have less pain, plan to do your activities during that time.

Pace Yourself – Balance Activity and Rest

- Take short breaks often while you are doing an activity
- Give your hands and arms a break. Switch to something else that uses another part of your body

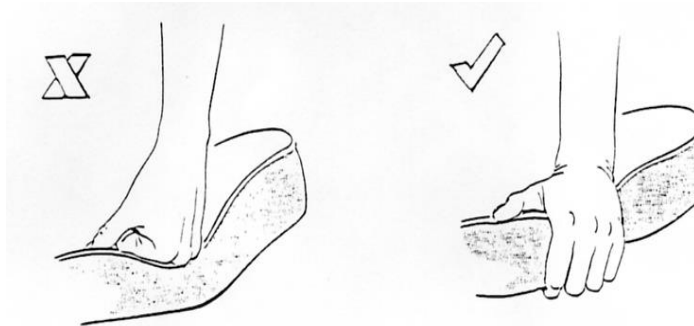
Avoid Side Pinch

- Use a pen grip or large key extension to change your grip



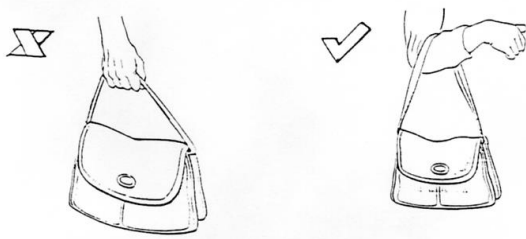
Avoid Pressure on the Backs of your Fingers

- Push up from chairs or low surfaces with the palms of your hands



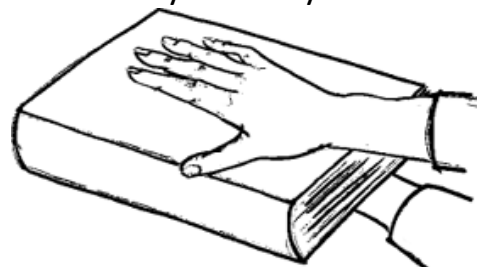
Use Stronger, Larger Joints

- Carry your purse over your forearm or shoulder
- Use a backpack or wheeled cart to carry groceries or other heavy loads



Use Two Hands

- Use 2 hands to carry heavy things. Keep it close to your body
- Use an open hand position



Avoid Tight Grasp

- Use padded or large handles to reduce the force needed to grip
- Avoid squeezing an exercise ball in your hands. It puts too much stress on the joints

Avoid holding one position too long and doing the same movement over and over

- Change positions often and pace yourself through the activity
- Use a book holder rather than holding a book or magazine
- Try a trackball instead of a computer mouse

Use equipment

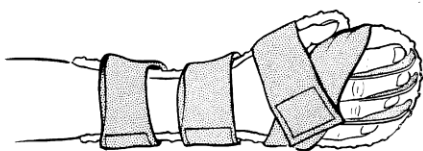
Choose a tool that has:

- **LEVERAGE** – less effort is needed to turn an object if the lever arm is long, e.g. tap turner, key extensions, jar openers
- **PADDED HANDLES** – large handles give you a secure hold without a tight grasp
- **FRICTION** – a non slippery surface is easier to grip and takes less effort, e.g. non skid material under a bowl or used to open a jar or turn a doorknob
- **LONG HANDLES** – long handles extend your reach, e.g. a reacher to get items from the floor or a high shelf, or a long handled comb to use when your shoulders hurt

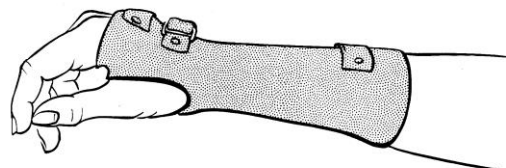
Use Splints

Splints help lower pain by holding your joints in a good position. They can be used when you are doing activities or when you are resting.

For resting:



For doing activities:



Use hot and cold for pain and swelling

- ICE is useful for pain and swelling in joints. Do not use ice if you have circulation problems like Raynauds in your hands. Wrap an ice pack or frozen food bag in a cold damp towel and place it on the joint.
- HEAT is useful for pain and stiffness in your joints, but do not use if your joint is swollen, hot or red
- You can use both heat and ice in CONTRAST BATHS. Soak hands in cold water for 10 – 20 seconds, then hot water for 5 - 10 seconds. Repeat for 10 minutes.
- Ice and or heat can be used 4 to 5 times a day, for 10 minutes each time.
- Do not use heat or ice if you have numbness or tingling in your hands. Talk to your therapist or doctor.

Time your activities with your medications

You may find you have good relief at some time after you take your medications. Plan your hardest activities for the time you know you will feel your best.

Do range of motion exercises

- Exercises will help keep movement and strength in your arms and hands and help lower pain and stiffness.
- Fit your exercises into your normal routine and try to do them at the same time each day. Do them while watching TV, listening to music, etc.

KEY MESSAGES

- Avoid side pinch and tight grips
- Use two hands
- Use friction, leverage and larger grips
- Plan ahead and pace your activity
- Change positions and take breaks
- Use heat and ice
- Do exercises regularly

EXERCISES

Hand exercises will keep your hand flexible and strong, which in turn will help to decrease the pain and stiffness in your hands

It is important to do the exercises correctly and to relax between each exercise. Be aware of your body posture and continue to breathe.

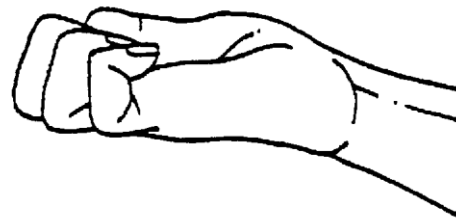
Try to incorporate your hand exercises into your daily routine, for example when you are watching TV, listening to music etc.

- Do exercises at least once or twice a day with each exercise repeated 5 to 10 times
- Apply heat (e.g. heat pack) or cold (ice pack) to your hands for 5 -10 minutes before & after you do these exercises. This will help decrease the pain and stiffness in your hands so you can exercise more easily

1) TUCK

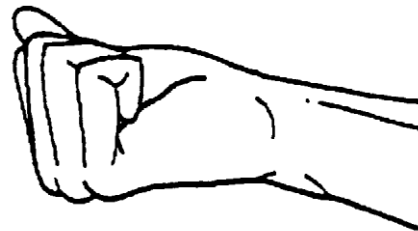
Curl the tips of your fingers down to touch the base of each finger.

Uncurl to the straight position.



2) FIST

Make a gentle fist curling all your fingers. Slowly open your hand wide.



3) TIP TO TIP

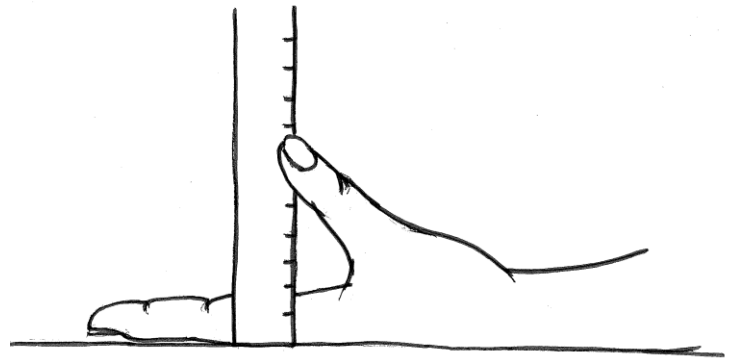
Touch the tip of your thumb to the tip of each finger, making a circle.

Open your hand completely after each touch.



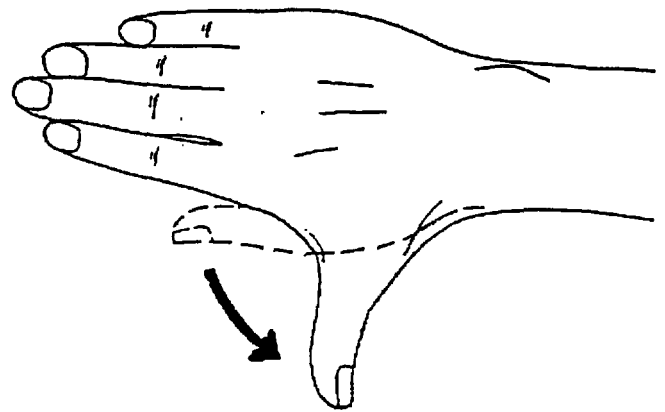
4) THUMB ABDUCTION

With your hands resting on table, palms up, move your thumb directly towards the ceiling. Always keep the thumb in line with the index finger.



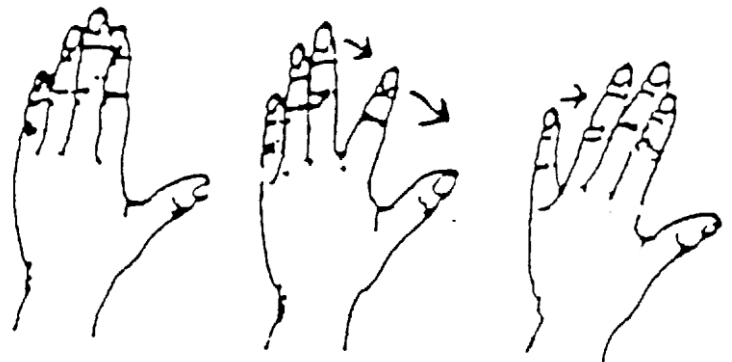
5) THUMB EXTENSION

Place the palm of your hand on a table. Bring your thumb away from the index finger and then back again.



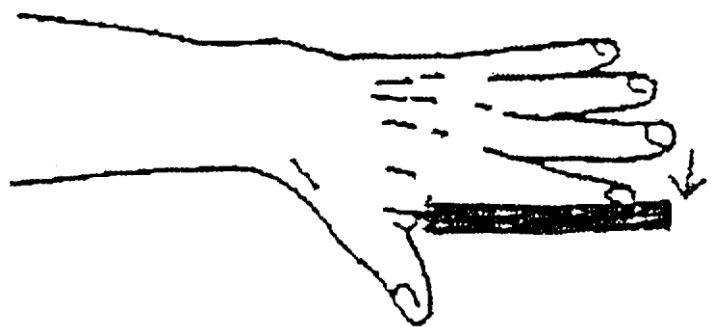
6) FINGER WALKING

With palm flat on table, lift or slide your fingers one by one towards thumb. Do not walk your fingers back.



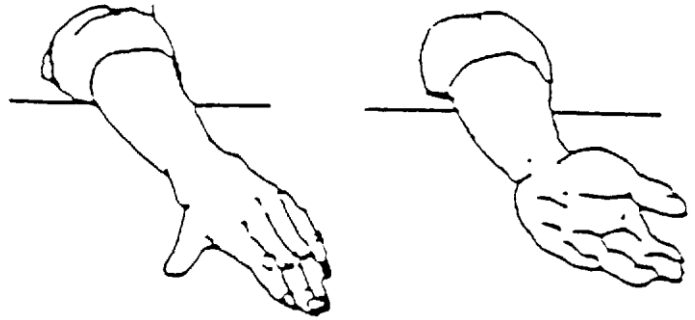
7) FINGER HOLDING

Place your palm flat on a table with fingers straight, place a pencil on the outer edge of each finger (on the thumb side). Press finger gently against the pencil. Hold for 6 seconds.



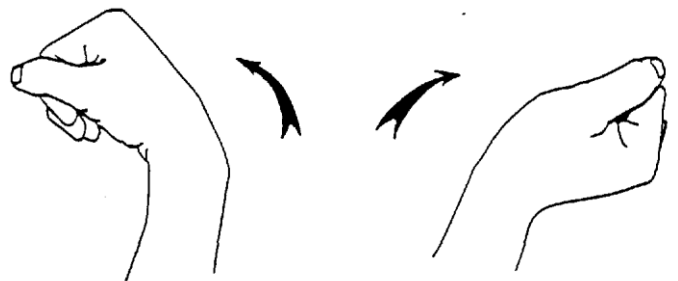
8) PALMS UP & DOWN

Place palm of hands and forearms flat on table. Tuck elbows snugly into your sides. Turn hands over to 'palms up' position, bringing thumb as close as possible to table, then return to original position.



9) WRIST EXTENSION / FLEXION

With your hands resting on the border of your little finger and your forearms supported on a table, bend wrists in and extend out.

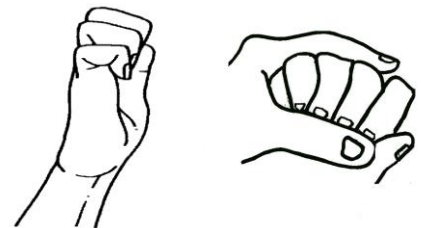


10) PASSIVE HOOK Stretch

Keep your knuckle straight to prevent bending. Use opposite hand to bend the middle and end joints of your fingers until you feel a mild stretch.

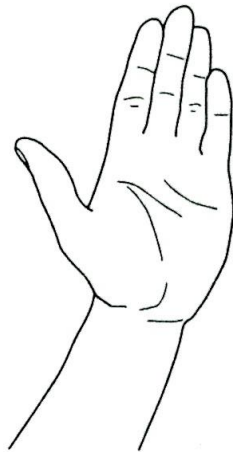
Hold stretch for 20 – 30 seconds.

Repeat 3 – 4 times.



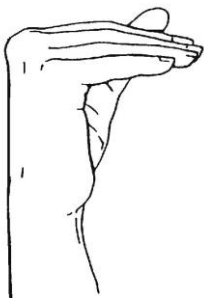
11) TENDON GLIDING

Starting Position = Straight hand position



- Make each type of fist as shown below.
- Always return to the straight hand position after each position.

Table Top



Hook Fist



Straight Fist



Full Fist



Do _____ repetitions of the sequence.

Do _____ sessions each day.

Exercise Balls – The use of exercise putty or squeezing exercise balls is not recommended as it can put too much stress on the joints of the hand