

Occupational therapy department

Protecting your joints and conserving your energy

This leaflet explains ways to reduce stress on your joints to help you remain as active and independent as possible.

Your occupational therapist will go through this information with you in more detail during your clinic appointment. If you have any further questions, contact your therapist at Guy's hospital on 020 7188 4185 or at St. Thomas' hospital on 020 7188 4180.

What is joint protection and energy conservation?

The term 'joint protection' is used to describe ways to reduce stress and pain in your joints. This can help to reduce inflammation and preserve your joints.

Conserving your energy also helps to protect your joints and improve endurance.

What should I do?

- Learn about your condition and how it can affect you (for example, pain).
- Learn to recognise the signs of stress on joints.
- Consider ways to reduce/prevent this stress by modifying tasks or using equipment.
- Try to integrate this into everyday life.
- Attempt to lead a balanced life by pacing activities and allowing time for exercise and rest.

Everyone will manage activities differently according to their own needs and lifestyle.

Understanding joint pain

- Pain is a warning of excessive stress or strain – this can lead to unnecessary joint damage and more pain.
- Some level of tiredness or discomfort may be unavoidable however tasks can be changed or made easier to reduce the stress on your joints.
- Attempt to reach a balance between inactivity and over exertion. Speak with your doctor if any pain appears unusual or causes you concern.

Exercise and rest

Try to find a balance, which will allow you to be independent but also to rest and avoid joint pain.

Why do I need to rest?

Rest will help you carry out activities for longer periods of time and improve how your muscles work.

How can I rest?

- Take frequent rests during the day (for example, an afternoon nap or stop and sit down for 10 minute when vacuuming).
- Rest before you feel exhausted.
- Sit down to do any jobs that will take more than 10 minutes (for example, ironing).
- Try not to sit for more than 20 or 30 minutes at a time – get up and walk around for a few minutes to prevent stiffness.
- Try to avoid lengthy projects which cannot be stopped at any time (for example, cooking a complicated meal).

Do I need to do any exercises?

Speak with your physiotherapist about exercise. You should aim to do a wide range of joint movement, muscle strength, activity tolerance and general movement. This will help you to stay independent when carrying out activities.

How can I conserve my energy?

It is important to prevent fatigue when managing any disability. Making activities as easy as possible will help. The following ways can help you do this:

- Pre plan and organise your activities (for example, what you need to do each day/week/month or which activities are light/heavy).
- Set priorities.
- Remove unnecessary tasks or parts of tasks.
- Take your time and avoid rushing.
- Use good posture and body mechanics (the positioning and movement of your body) when doing an activity. For example, sit down to work or perch on a high stool, and avoid standing for long periods.
- Avoid unnecessary activity. For example, do everything upstairs before coming down in the morning to avoid extra trips up and down the stairs.
- Arrange your work environment so you can work at heights that suit you and equipment can be easily found and reached.
- Use assistive tools, equipment and convenience items where possible, including:
 - lightweight equipment, electric tin opener, washing machine
 - easy care fabrics such as polyester/cotton sheets
 - convenience foods with fresh foods.
- Take frequent, planned rest periods.

You may find it helpful to ask yourself:

- How many trips were made between two points? Could this be reduced?
- Do storage areas only have the tools you need or are they cluttered with seldom used things?
- Is there someone else who could do part of the task?
- Is there an easier/more comfortable way of achieving this task?

How will good posture help?

Good posture can help to prevent a lot of pain and deformity. Consider the following:

- Stand or walk as straight as possible with your head high, shoulders straight, stomach in, hips and knees straight.
- Sit in a straight back chair with a firm, high seat with your feet on the floor and arms rested on the chair or your lap.
- Lie as straight as possible in bed on your back. If you're in a wheelchair for long periods, consider trying to lie on your stomach with feet hanging over the mattress for short periods to help prevent contractures (a permanent loss of joint motion).
- The most comfortable position for you is not always the best and may lead to deformity (for example, a pillow under your knees may lead to stiffness).
- When rising from a chair, slide to the edge of the seat, with your feet slightly apart and flat on the floor. Lean your body forward from the hips. Push forwards and upwards straightening your hips and knees at the same time. If you need to push with your arms, push up on using your palms, not your fingers,
- Change positions often to avoid stiffness.
- Work with a table and chair at a comfortable height. Avoid low seats, soft chairs and beds.
- Use stronger, larger joints where possible (for example, lift with two hands and use your forearms).
- Grip objects in the palm of your hand to avoid straining your fingers. Avoid gripping for long periods (for example, holding a book).
- Make handles bigger to prevent strain on your knuckles and finger joints. Use long handles to give leverage (for example, tap turners). Do not twist towards the little finger.
- Wear any splints/orthoses that have been made for you, as instructed.

How can I protect my joints while doing my daily activities?

- Slide objects rather than lift them.
- Push objects with the palm of your hand rather than pulling with your fingers.
- Lift heavier objects on forearms, palms or with two hands close to your body.
- Push doors with forearms or your body, not your fingers.
- Use large handled cups (possibly two handles).
- Carry bags over your shoulder, not in your hands.
- Relax your hand for moments when writing/painting/sewing.
- Use your leg (not back) muscles when lifting.
- Wring flannels around taps rather than with your fingers.
- Get help from others, such as family or social services.
- When opening jars place the palm of your hand on top and keep your fingers straight to twist. Store items in small containers to avoid heavy lifting.
- Use lightweight, built up objects, such as an electric razor and large handled cutlery.
- Take boiled vegetables out of the water with a strainer to prevent having to lift the heavy pot of water. Use the sink to support saucepans when emptying.
- Fill the kettle only with enough water for one cup. Use a jug to fill the kettle or saucepan with water.
- Rest washing up bowls on a rack in the sink to prevent bending/stooping.
- Place a rod or skewer through keys to help leverage when turning.

Splints/orthoses

You may be given hand splints to rest your joints and relieve inflammation, swelling (oedema) or pain. Splints can support painful/unstable joints during activity and help with normal movement. They can also lower pressure on nerves by keeping a neutral position.

What equipment can I use to help me?

Your therapist can tell you where to get equipment. Examples of equipment include:

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| Feeding aids | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• lightweight built up cutlery• adapted plates/plate guards• large handled mugs/cups |
| Dressing aids | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• long handled shoe horn• button hooks• elastic shoe laces |
| Bathing | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• long handled sponges• bath board and seats• power bath lifts• showers |
| Kitchen | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• tap turners• bottle/jar/tin openers• food preparation systems• non slip mats• kitchen trolley• plug handles• perching stools |
| Mobility transfers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• mechanical or high chairs• stair lifts |
| Toileting | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• commodes• raised toilet seats and frames |

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about the information in this leaflet, please contact your therapist **Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm**

Guy's hospital on 020 7188 4185

St. Thomas' hospital on 020 7188 4180

Pharmacy medicines helpline

For information about any medicines that you have been prescribed at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals, you can speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

e: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)

For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital.

t: 020 7188 3416

Language support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

t: 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

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Membership is free and it is completely up to you how much you get involved. To become a member of our Foundation Trust, you need to be 18 years of age or over, live in Lambeth, Southwark, Lewisham, Wandsworth or Westminster or have been a patient at either hospital in the last five years.

To join, please call 0848 143 4017, email members@gstt.nhs.uk or visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk

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