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, please contact your therapist (details at the end of this leaflet).

What are 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 too much stress or strain – this can lead to unnecessary joint damage and more pain.
- Some level of tiredness or discomfort may be unavoidable, but tasks can be changed or made easier to reduce the stress on your joints.
- Try 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 allows 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 minutes 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 exercises. You should aim to do a wide range of joint movement, muscle strength, and activity tolerance exercises, as well as general movement. This will help you to stay independent when carrying out activities.

How can I conserve my energy?
Preventing fatigue will help you to manage and participate in activities that are important for you. The following suggestions can help you do this:
- Pre-plan and organise your activities. Consider activities you need and would like to do daily and during the week/month. It may be helpful to pair activities that are light and heavy.
- Take frequent, planned, rest periods.
- Set priorities.
- Don’t be shy to ask for help from family and friends.
- 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.
- Where possible, avoid unnecessary activity. For example, do everything upstairs before coming down in the morning, to reduce the need to go upstairs.
- Arrange your work environment so you can work at heights that suit you, and equipment can be easily found and reached.
  - Consider assistive tools and lightweight equipment, for example, use a smaller kettle, electric tin opener, and jar opener.
  - Use easy care fabrics such as polyester/cotton sheets.
  - Consider ready meals.

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 items you rarely use?
- 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.
- Consider your seating. A straight-backed chair with a firm, high seat with your feet on the floor is best.
- Change positions often to avoid stiffness.
- 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, lifting your hips and knees at the same time.
- If you need to push up from a chair with your arms, use your palms, not your fingers.
- Work with a table and chair at a comfortable height. Avoid low seats, soft chairs and beds.
- Grip objects in the palm of your hand to avoid straining your fingers.
- Avoid prolonged grips, for example, when holding a book.
- Make handles bigger to prevent strain on your knuckles and finger joints.
- Wear any splints/orthoses that have been given to you, as instructed.

How can I protect my joints while doing my daily activities?
Where possible use larger joints, for example:
- Push open doors with forearms or your body.
- Slide objects rather than lift them.
- Push objects with the palm of your hand.
- Lift heavier objects on forearms, palms or with two hands close to your body.
- Use large-handled, lighter cups (possibly with two handles).
- Carry bags over your shoulder.
- Relax your hand for moments when writing/painting/sewing.
- 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.
- Minimise the need to lift items. Consider keeping items you use within reach for easy access
- Store items in small containers to avoid heavy lifting
- Steam or boil vegetables using a strainer, or remove with a strainer.
- Reduce need to use heavy objects: Consider a smaller, lightweight kettle, or fill the kettle with enough water for one cup.
- Use a small vessel, for example, a cup to fill larger pots

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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeding aids</th>
<th>Kitchen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• lightweight, built-up cutlery</td>
<td>• tap turners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• adapted plates/plate guards</td>
<td>• bottle/jar/tin openers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• large-handled mugs/cups</td>
<td>• food preparation systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• non-slip mats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• kitchen trolleys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• plug handles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• perching stools</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dressing aids</th>
<th>Mobility transfers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• long-handled shoe horn</td>
<td>• mechanical or high chairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• button hooks</td>
<td>• stair lifts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• elastic shoe laces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bathing</th>
<th>Toileting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• long-handled sponges</td>
<td>• commodes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• bath-boards and seats</td>
<td>• raised toilet seats and frames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• power bath lifts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• showers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Contact us**

If you have any questions or concerns about the information in this leaflet, please contact your therapist at **Guy’s Hospital**, t: 020 7188 4185, or at **St Thomas’ Hospital**, t: 020 7188 4180, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

**Pharmacy Medicines Helpline**
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. t: 020 7188 8748, Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm

**Your comments and concerns**
For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

- t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS)  e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk
- t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints)  e: complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

**Language and accessible support services**
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch. t: 020 7188 8815  e: languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

**NHS 111**
Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

- t: 111