

Hand Therapy

Joint management for thumb arthritis

What is joint management?

Joint management is a way of learning how to use your hands to reduce pain, prevent flare ups, and avoid further problems with your joints and the structures around them.

When a joint is swollen or inflamed, the tissues around it can stretch and this allows more movement than is normal. Putting too much pressure on these joints can make them more unstable and reduced how well your hand works.

Therapists will encourage you to do regular, gentle exercises, without using too much force. Staying in the same position for a long time can make your joints stiff and painful. You should change positions often to prevent this.

Movement and exercise

Movement and exercise are **not** harmful for your hand joints. In fact, your hands can become stronger and healthier with regular movement. Even on days when you feel unwell, you should continue doing the hand exercises your therapist has shown you, but at a reduced intensity. This will help maintain your range of movement without aggravating your symptoms.



Respect pain

If you feel pain after an activity, it might mean you have done too much. It is better to pace your activities throughout the day. For example, do physically hard jobs, such as housework or mowing the lawn, at different times of the day instead of doing them all at once. This can help you stay active and finish tasks more comfortably.

Joint management means changing how you do things. This might take time to get used to, but these changes will reduce pain and help keep your hands working well for as long as possible.

Principles of Joint management

1. Spread the load and the force across as many joints

When lifting or picking things up, use your palms to scoop them rather than holding them between your thumb and first finger. This uses your wrists and part of your forearm to help support the load. This technique can be helpful when:

- Holding a tray, book or a package with your palms to support the load.
- Sliding heavy objects, such as pots and pans, across a surface (to the sink) rather than lifting them.

2. Use the strongest and largest joints Carry shopping bags over your forearm instead of using your fingers.

- Push open doors with your shoulder or elbow instead of your hand.
Use 2 hands to lift or carry objects to share the weight.

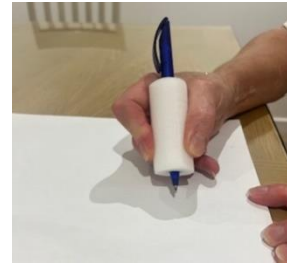
3. Use tools to make tasks easier

- Try assistive devices like jar openers, electric can openers, lever taps and larger key fobs..
- These reduce the effort needed and can help avoid pain.



Patient Information

- **4. Avoid static positions and tight gripping**
Use items with large handles, like wide handles/barrelled pens or cutlery. You can make handles larger with padding. Your therapist can advise you further about this.
- These reduce strain on your hands and make gripping easier.



5. Avoid diagonal forces

- Instead of holding a mug by its handle, carry it from the side or with 2 hands.
- Do not carry a pan with 1 hand, use 2 hands or slide it across the counter.

6. Respect your pain

If you feel pain during an activity, stop and take a break.

7. Plan, problem solve and pace

- To reduce pain and tiredness, plan your day to include periods of rest and activity.
- Organise your day so you are not standing or sitting for too long. It can cause stiffness and increase pain.
- If possible, delegate heavier tasks and prioritise what needs to be done. Break tasks into smaller chunks. While tasks may take longer and require more planning. This approach will help manage your pain and fatigue, allowing you to better manage your condition.

8. Use adaptive devices

Many adaptive devices are available to make everyday tasks easier.

Below are examples of items that can help make your life easier and reduce the stress on your thumb joint

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- L shaped knives: These let you use your fingers instead of your thumb for better control.

- Ring pull can openers: Easy to use and reduce strain on the hand.



- Spring loaded scissors: These help take the pressure off your thumb when cutting.



Other helpful tips for protecting your joints

Straining vegetables

Instead of lifting and pouring from the pan, cook the vegetables in a wire basket. When they're ready, you can lift and drain them, to avoid the strain of pouring hot water.

Using a kettle

- Use a plastic jug to fill the kettle from the tap and only add as much needed.
- You can also use a kettle tipper or a smaller, lightweight travel kettle.
- To reduce strain, use both hands when pouring and always protect your skin from the heat by using a cloth.

Turning taps

- If you find it hard to turn taps on with one hand, use both hands on the sides of the tap handle for better control. Try tap turners or changing to lever taps, which can make turning taps easier and reduce strain on your hands.

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Opening jars and bottles

Dry skin can make gripping harder. Use a damp dish cloth or a non-slip mat like 'dycem.'

Stabilise the jar or bottle with 1 hand and use both hands on the lid. You can also use a jar opener device for extra help.



Peeling and cutting

Use **wide-handed peelers** and **cutlery**. They are **easier to hold and** reduce strain on your joints.



All the images have been produced at UHCW

Contact Information If you need more advice, please contact your Therapy Department:

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Patient Information

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Document History

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|-------------|-----------------|
| Department: | Hand Therapy |
| Contact: | 25969 |
| Updated: | February 2025 |
| Review: | February 2027 |
| Version: | 1 |
| Reference: | HIC/LFT/2954/25 |