



Blackrock Clinic
Member of the Blackrock Healthcare Group

Blackrock Clinic Physiotherapy Department – Patient Information

How to manage flare ups of hand arthritis pain

Focus on strategies to minimise any inflammation or load of the joint to reduce symptoms of pain and swelling.

What to do...

- Use the principles of joint protection
- Use ice or heat to help your symptoms of swelling and pain
- Stop any resistance exercises but you can continue to move your joints gently as this will help to lubricate and provide nutrition for your joints
- Minimize the activities that really flare your joints such as; hoovering, ironing, gardening, opening tight jars or peeling veg
- If you have a support or splint use it a bit more during the day particularly with aggravating activities such as lifting pots or pans or carrying your shopping bag and wear it at night
- If prescribed medication to help by your doctor don't be afraid to use this to really help to settle your symptoms.

Once you feel your symptoms are settling down and getting back to what they would usually be like wean the support/splint to your usual wearing schedule if you use one, re-introduce your usual activities and gradually re-introduce your exercises. Your doctor will discuss how to reduce your medications and when that is appropriate to do so.

Principles of joint protection

- Listen to your pain
- Stopping a task before it becomes painful
- Using equipment or both hands to make it easier to complete tasks (jar pop to break the seal of a jar, lifting a kettle with both hands, using the palm of your hand to change gears rather than gripping with your thumb)
- Using larger areas or more joints to complete a task (hugging an object into your chest so that you are not excessively gripping with your hands and thumb)
- Avoiding prolonged postures

Ice or heat

If you have any issues with your skin or circulation please discuss with a therapist before using either modality.

Ice is often good for a hot throbbing swollen joint. Using a pack of frozen peas wrapped in towel wrap it around the joint or joints in question. Leave in place for 10 to 15 minutes, if you feel it is getting too cold or if it is becoming uncomfortable remove it.

Heat can be useful for dull achy pain or muscular type pain. You can either using a hot pack or hot water bottle wrapped in towelling over the area where you are feeling pain. You can leave this in place for 15 to 20 minutes however if it feels like it is getting too hot please remove. It is good to check your skin every 5 minutes or so that the heat is on.

Supports/splint

There are lots of different types of supports and splints that are useful for your wrist and hand. They help by resting your joints in positions that reduce the load on the tissues around your joints. This supported rest is helpful to reduce inflammation around your joints. If you do not have a splint or support and think it would be helpful to you please contact the physiotherapy department for assistance.

Contact Us

If you have any questions please contact the physiotherapy department either by email physiotherapy@blackrock-clinic.com or by telephone 01 206 4683.