

# Tips to Ease Joint Pain

Arthritis pain in even one joint can take a toll on your entire body. For example, a painful neck can prevent you from turning your head properly, placing stress on your shoulders. A painful knee may cause you to walk in a way that affects your hips, back and feet. And holding a joint still to protect it can make moving it more difficult – and in some cases almost impossible – over time.

If joint pain is caused by an inflammatory disease such as rheumatoid arthritis or juvenile idiopathic arthritis, systemic treatment is needed to stop inflammation that can lead to joint damage or destruction. For flares of pain, persistent pain, or pain due to other causes, there are many things you can do on your own – or ask your doctor or physical therapist about – to get relief.

Solutions vary and may include splints, therapeutic exercises, or more informal daily modifications at home and beyond. Here are a few suggestions to help ease joint pain head-to-toe:



## Neck Pain

Neck pain can make it difficult to look up or turn your head sideways. If you avoid twisting your neck by moving your shoulders or entire body, the surrounding muscles may hurt as much as the joints themselves.

Solutions: Place moist heat on muscles to help them relax. Sleep with a cervical pillow – or no pillow at all – to help alleviate neck pain. Practice slow range-of-motion exercises – like moving your head up and down and side to side – to help prevent loss of motion and decrease pain.

## Jaw Pain

The mandible joint can be a frequent source of discomfort, making it painful to bite into a thick sandwich or an apple. Jaw pain is common on the side of the face or just in front of the ear.

Solutions: During episodes of jaw pain, eat softer foods that require less force to eat, cut food into small bites to minimize chewing and avoid chewing gum. Use moist heat or cold – or a combination of the two – to ease pain. Avoid activities such as clenching the jaw, cradling a phone between your ear and neck, or resting your chin on your hand, which can worsen pain. When yawning, support your jaw by placing light pressure underneath your chin with your thumb and index finger. Massage the muscles of the head and neck to relieve tension.

## Elbow Pain

Even when it causes pain, it's important to straighten your elbow, or you could eventually lose the ability to do so. Over time, holding any joint in a bent position may cause the muscles on that side to shorten.

Solutions: Use a heating pad or take a warm bath or shower to loosen the joint and relax stiff muscles. Apply ice packs for swelling. To prevent the muscles from shortening, try exercises that require straightening your elbow, such as pushing away light objects or “pushing” pretend objects up to the ceiling. Speak with a physical therapist about different types of braces and splints that take pressure off painful elbows and permit healing.

## **Wrist Pain**

If your wrists are painful, just raising them or making a fist can be difficult.

Solutions: Using a functional splint during the day may help you perform tasks with less pain. Using a resting splint at night provides extra support and may prevent deformity. These exercises may also help relieve wrist pain:

Use the thumb on one hand to slowly and gently pull the thumb away from the fingers on opposite hand. Hold for a count of 25. Repeat with other hand.

With your arms stretched out in front of you at chest level, place your wrists back to back, then slowly stretch them away from each other. Hold for a count of 25.

If pain persists, work with a therapist on strengthening the muscles on the back and side of the arm.

## **Finger Pain**

Painful fingers can make it difficult to pick up small objects or hold a pen or pencil.

Solutions: When writing, use pens or pencils with soft grip covers. Children with finger pain can use large pencils or crayons. When possible, use a computer instead of writing by hand and use voice-recognition software if you find it difficult to use a keyboard. Use Play-Doh, putty, or a stress ball to strengthen your fingers.

## **Hip Pain**

Hip pain can make it difficult to walk, climb steps, sit for long periods or even sleep. Hip pain in children may signal uncontrolled inflammation, which left untreated, may cause joint damage and growth problems. So, it's especially important for children to seek professional help from a physical therapist or rheumatologist. This is also true for adults with inflammatory forms of arthritis like RA.

Solutions: Practice range-of-motion and stretching exercises to maintain flexibility, ease pain and reduce the risk of further injury. Soaking in a warm bath can also help dial down pain and stiffness and make exercising easier. Here are two exercises to try:

Lie on your back with knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Gently tightening core and buttocks, lift your hips three to five inches off floor. Avoid arching your back. Hold for five to 10 seconds, then slowly lower hips to floor. Repeat 10 times, two to four times daily.

Lie on your back with both legs straight. Slowly pull one knee toward your chest with both hands until you feel a gentle stretch in your buttock. Hold for 30 to 60 seconds. Keep stomach muscles tightened and slowly lower leg back down. Repeat with other leg. Practice two to four times daily.

## **Knee Pain**

If pain and stiffness make it difficult to straighten the knee, you may walk with a limp and find it hard to squat or climb stairs.

Solutions: When experiencing knee pain, you should rest with your knee straight and your heel propped up. Use a cane in the hand opposite the affected knee when walking, particularly on uneven surfaces, or climbing stairs. A physical therapist can work with you to strengthen the quadricep muscles for knee support.

One exercise to try: Lie on your back with one leg bent and the other straight. Tighten the muscles of the straightened leg and lift your leg to the level of your other knee. Slowly lower. Perform 10 repetitions, and then switch legs. Repeat two more times and practice at least once daily.

### **Ankle Pain**

Your ankle can require some support if it becomes weak and painful.

Solutions: An in-shoe orthotic can support the structure of the foot to relieve pain when standing and walking. Strengthen muscles by performing ankle circles in the bath or using the feet to make letters of the alphabet.

Perform exercises that stretch the calf muscles. One to try: Sit on the floor with your legs stretched out in front of you. Fold a towel lengthwise and wrap around the soles of your feet. Gently flex your feet and toes upward. If this is too much on your quadriceps, you may bend your knees slightly. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat up to 10 times.

### **Foot Pain**

When your foot hurts, the pain is usually worse on the ball of the foot, making it harder to walk or raise your toes.

Solutions: Place a small pad just behind the ball of the foot to relieve pressure on the foot. Wear low-heeled shoes with a roomy toe box.

Source: Arthritis Foundation ([Arthritis@Work](#))