

Self-Care for Rheumatoid Arthritis

Along with taking your medicines, exercising regularly, and eating healthy foods, many self-care actions can help you manage your RA and feel better.

Joint protection, good body mechanics, and for some, alternative therapies can decrease joint damage and improve quality of life.

Protect your joints. Certain joint movements may increase your risk of developing deformed joints. Be very careful how you use your hands.

Work with a physical or occupational therapist to find exercises that are best for you.

They may recommend changing daily activities to help protect your joints.

For example:

Instead of making a tight fist or grasping objects tightly use tools with large padded handles.

Instead of pinching items between your thumb and fingers try holding objects in your open palms.

Many devices can help you open jars, reach for objects, open doors and get dressed.

Use proper body mechanics to lessen joint strain and conserve energy.

Maintain good posture. Make sure you have good back and foot support when you sit.

Use an angled surface for reading and writing to decrease neck strain. Increase the height of your chair to decrease stress on your knees and hips when sitting and rising.

Carry objects close to your body and support the weight on your forearms.

Always try to use your largest joints whenever possible. Save weaker, smaller joints for tasks that only they can do.

Don't repeat activities that stress your joints, especially during joint flare-ups.

You are more likely to damage your joints when they are painful and swollen.

To prevent stiff joints, don't keep your joints in the same position for long periods. When writing, release your grip every 10-15 minutes.

When working at the computer or watching TV, stand up and move around every half hour or so.

Some people with RA may benefit from alternative therapies like meditation and relaxation.

For your health and well-being, don't replace prescribed treatments with alternative therapies. Instead, talk to your healthcare provider about any methods you would like to try.

Work together to decide which ones you can safely add to your treatment plan.

You don't have to make all these changes at once. Instead, gradually add these self-care tips to your everyday activities. Sticking with them can help you better manage your rheumatoid arthritis.