Joint Protection

A Lifelong Skill

By: Luella Grangaard, MS, OTR, CHT Manager, Occupational Therapy Eisenhower Medical Center

Luella Grangaard, MS, OTR, CHT, Manager, Occupational Therapy, explains joint stress in the thumb. Splints are often used for individuals with joint pain.

Joint protection is the practice of using the joints of the body in ways to reduce stress, pain and deformity while performing daily activities. There are a few basic concepts that can easily be incorporated into your daily routine, which will extend the life of all your joints. Avoid Static Positions

Have you ever written with a small pen or stirred cake batter for a long period of time? Afterward, your hand probably felt tired and stiff. This discomfort is caused by extended periods of static positioning. To avoid fatigue from maintaining a single position, take a break from the activity or use a different tool. For example, use a large grip pen instead of a smaller one, which requires a tighter grip. Sitting in a chair watching television is a static position and causes stiffness. Remember to move around and stretch often. Weight Bearing Joints

The large joints such as the knees and hips are the weight bearing joints. Distributing weight over these large joints, which are well supported by the major muscle groups of your legs, protects the small vertebral joints of your back. Bending over with your back and lifting a heavy box can result in back pain and joint stress. When bending is required, bend your knees and hips, keeping the back straight and the box close to you. This position will utilize the larger and stronger joints of your knees and hips to complete the task, and protect the small vertebral joints. External Stress

Opening a new water bottle or jar can be a difficult and painful task, because of the strength requirement placed on the small muscles and joints of the fingers, hands and wrists. Instead, use a jar opener, a pair of pliers, or a grip designed to assist with opening jars. In addition, tap the side of the bottle on a table edge to break the seal to decrease this external stress. Proper Positioning and Rest

All of the body's joints need both motion and rest to maintain their health. However, joints should be in the proper position when resting. When sitting, use a firm armchair. The chair should support your back properly and be high enough for you to get in and out of easily, using the chair arms for assistance. In addition, splints are used for individuals with joint pain. The thumb is a very mobile joint, which allows us the ability to do many activities; however, extensive use and joint stress may result in thumb pain and arthritis. A simple splint worn at night to rest the thumb in the proper position is very helpful in reducing pain. Eisenhower Medical Center's Occupational Therapists can provide custom splints, which will assist in maintaining these positions.

While many of the concepts described here seem simple and easy, people often forget that there are easier or different ways to accomplish everyday tasks. Even if you don't feel pain or see changes in your joints, try using the movements and tips described above.

For more information, please call the Eisenhower Occupational Therapy Department at 760-773-2033.

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