

THE
EVERYTHING
HEALTHY
LIVING SERIES

Arthritis: Coping with Arthritis

*The most important information
you need to improve your health*



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The Everything® Healthy Living Series
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Contents

Introduction

Living Well with Arthritis

Learning to Live with Pain

Learning to Live with Fatigue

Learning to Live with Uncertainty

Learning to Manage Stress

Learning to Manage Depression and Anxiety

Learning to Adjust and Adapt

How to Remain Inspired

Living in a Normal World

Traveling with Arthritis

Shopping Tips

Cooking/Kitchen Work

Arthritis-Friendly Hobbies and Activities

Asking for Help

Also Available

Copyright Page

Introduction

For more than 10 years, millions of readers have trusted the bestselling Everything series for expert advice and important information on health topics ranging from pregnancy and postpartum care to heart health, anxiety, and diabetes. Packed with the most recent, up-to-date data, Everything health guides help you get the right diagnosis, choose the best doctor, and find the treatment options that work for you.

The Everything® Healthy Living Series books are concise guides, focusing on only the essential information you need. Whether you're looking for an overview of traditional and alternative migraine treatments, advice on starting a heart-healthy lifestyle, or suggestions for finding the right medical team, there's an Everything Healthy Living Book for you.

Arthritis

It can be completely unnerving to have nothing wrong with you one day and severe pain the next day. Since pain is a somewhat common symptom associated with many different conditions, it is hard to know initially what to do or how to react to the sudden change. Not every type of arthritis develops suddenly, but that sense of confusion that builds when you accept that it's not going to go away can sometimes lead you down the wrong path.

No matter what type of arthritis you have, early diagnosis and early treatment can help prevent joint damage and disability. There are many approaches to treating arthritis, both conventional and alternative. There are myriad books written on the subject. The Internet provides even more information about arthritis. It can almost be considered too much information, because a person experiencing the initial onset of arthritis symptoms often doesn't know where to begin. Should you pick up a book

about osteoarthritis and learn all about it? Maybe you should choose the book about rheumatoid arthritis? Perhaps it's sufficient to self-treat with over-the-counter arthritis medications? How do you know you are making the right decisions?

Choosing the right starting point can impact the course of your disease. It's imperative to be evaluated by a rheumatologist, a specialist in diagnosing and treating arthritis and related conditions. Getting an accurate diagnosis is the first step to getting proper treatment and managing the disease.

Chronic arthritis affects every aspect of daily living. This practical guide will show you how to live better with arthritis. The day you are diagnosed with arthritis is the first day of your new reality. Your new reality can overwhelm you, or you can choose to face it with courage and perseverance. Your willingness to accept your new reality and adjust and adapt to it, as well as your ability to cope and an unwillingness to give up, are all factors that will influence how well you live with arthritis.

The intent of this book is to help you learn about the disease, teach you to be your own advocate, help you make better decisions, and inspire you to realize that there is still a high quality of life after an arthritis diagnosis. The first step: Understanding that change is inevitable.

If you'd like to learn more about arthritis, check out *The Everything® Health Guide to Arthritis*, available in print (978-1-59869-410-9) and eBook (978-1-60550-230-4) formats.

Living Well with Arthritis

How well you live with arthritis will depend on how well you cope with the changes that having a chronic disease will impose on your life. There will be physical changes and emotional changes, and on any given day you will be dealing with both at the same time. Your response to treatment will in part control your pain level and other arthritis symptoms, but your approach to living with arthritis will also have a big impact on how well you do.

Learning to Live with Pain

You wake up with pain. You go to bed with pain. Activity makes it flare. Rest doesn't always help much. Day after day after day — it can be grueling. Yet you have to live your best life possible in spite of it.

Some people have a harder time than others learning to cope with chronic pain. People who feel out of control because of chronic pain are the ones who don't do as well. It's important to be consistent with actions which help you feel in control. You will help yourself cope with chronic pain if you:

- Find a doctor who understands how pain affects your life.
- Allow your thoughts and emotions to move away from the pain — however you can accomplish it.
- Assess on a regular basis whether you are doing all you can do to control pain associated with arthritis.
- Replace bad habits that exacerbate pain (e.g., poor sleep habits) with good habits that promote pain relief.
- Accept that pain is a disruption in your life, but never stop searching or discovering ways to minimize the disruption.

- Chronic pain lasts a lifetime, so you must make decisions that will have long-lasting positive effects.

Chronic Pain Studies

The above advice may sound great in theory, but it must truly be applied. A study led by Lance M. McCracken from the University of Chicago, published in the journal *Pain* in 1998, reported that acceptance of pain was associated with “lower pain intensity, less pain-related anxiety and avoidance, less depression, less physical and psychosocial disability, more daily uptime, and better work status.”

Another study, published in the same journal in 1999 (Arnstein et al.), concluded that “the lack of belief in one’s own ability to manage pain, cope and function despite persistent pain, is a significant predictor of the extent to which individuals with chronic pain become disabled and/or depressed.”

The studies reinforce that goals for learning to live with chronic pain should focus on: reducing pain, improving function, and building upon the belief that you can cope (self-efficacy).

Never Give Up

Chronic pain can be relentless, and you may begin to feel nothing you do matters. Never give up. Expect to have bouts of pain that seem untouchable. Remember that you are like a football player that has to take the field for every game. Arthritis is no game, but the analogy still fits. You have to keep taking the field. Keep in mind that certain factors exacerbate pain, while other factors help block or control pain. Focus on the factors that help control pain, such as medication, physical activity or exercise, relaxation techniques, and distraction (e.g., humor, hobbies). Avoid whatever exacerbates the pain-stress-depression cycle.

Find What Works for You

Though it's helpful to learn what helps other chronic pain and arthritis patients cope with pain, it's important to figure out what works for you. Never allow yourself to feel overwhelmed or to believe you are out of options. If whatever pain-relieving technique has worked in the past has become less effective, you may have to add more weapons to fight pain.

Feeling defeated will consume energy you need to fight pain. It's easier to say than to do, but you must replace feelings of discouragement with courage, hopelessness with hopefulness, pessimism with optimism, and passivity with assertiveness. John Quincy Adams once said, "Patience and perseverance have a magical effect before which difficulties disappear and obstacles vanish."

Learning to Live with Fatigue

Fatigue is a major problem for people with arthritis, especially inflammatory types of arthritis. Arthritis pain can exacerbate sleep problems, and the reverse is also true — poor sleep can exacerbate arthritis pain. Sleep problems shouldn't be dismissed, because there are actions you can take to improve sleep and reduce fatigue.

What Contributes to Fatigue?

Arthritis patients are often easily fatigued by daily living tasks that seem effortless for healthy people. A flare in disease activity can be expected to increase fatigue. Other factors that are known to increase fatigue include:

- **Overdoing or pushing beyond your limits with activity** — Remember that pain is a signal to stop. If you overdo, your body will respond with more pain and greater fatigue.
- **Disrupted sleep or insomnia** — Pain and discomfort associated with arthritis can interfere with normal sleep patterns. Insomnia is a problem falling asleep or staying asleep.

- **Medication side effects** — Medications used to treat arthritis symptoms can have a side effect of increasing fatigue. A dosage adjustment may help.
- **Anemia of chronic disease** — Low red-cell counts or low hemoglobin are commonly associated with inflammatory types of arthritis. Fatigue can be a consequence of anemia.
- **Mental drain** — The physical aspects of arthritis can be mentally and emotionally draining. Fatigue can be exacerbated by depression, sadness, and feelings of hopelessness.

Fact

Knowing what contributes to fatigue will help you focus on solutions. Fatigue is a recognized symptom of arthritis and related conditions, yet studies have shown it is often overlooked. The newer biologics drugs help to reduce fatigue, dramatically in some patients.

What Helps to Reduce Fatigue?

Recognizing what causes fatigue and what makes it worse will guide you toward actions that will help you control the problem. Conserving energy is the primary goal for controlling fatigue. You will have to make a conscious effort to conserve energy, and in this busy world we live in it doesn't always come easy. To conserve energy, pace yourself. Balance rest and periods of activity. Also, be flexible. If you are having a bad day, readjust and reschedule. It's important to plan ahead. If you know a particular day will be hectic, be sure the evening hours or next day will be stress free. Finally, don't underestimate the importance of convenience. Organize your environment and your schedule so that conserving energy is a priority.

Although the physical toll of having arthritis is the reason you feel fatigued much of the time or have trouble sleeping, advice that applies to healthy persons with sleep problems may benefit you as well.

According to the National Institutes of Health, you should choose a sleep schedule and stick to it. Don't exercise too close to your bedtime and avoid caffeine in the late afternoon or evening. Avoid alcohol before bedtime and avoid large meals or drinking a lot of fluids late at night. Avoid medications with known side effects of keeping you awake. Late-afternoon or late-day naps may interfere with falling asleep at night. Relax and wind down before bedtime; take a warm bath or shower if it helps. Clear your sleep environment of distractions.

Again, it's most important to identify what makes fatigue worse and what makes it better. You will find it requires a delicate balance. Listen to your body and pay attention to signals. Getting good sleep regularly helps break the pain-fatigue-stress-depression cycle.

Learning to Live with Uncertainty

Most people, healthy or not, live with uncertainty in their lives. You may get a good job, marry a fine person, and have children, but you are never certain of what the future holds. There is an element of uncertainty inherent to living.

People who have chronic illnesses have another layer of uncertainty to deal with. Most people with chronic illnesses, if given the opportunity, would preview their life five, ten, fifteen, and twenty years down the road. You can't — so that's akin to wishing for what you know you can't have. Rather than focusing on the future, you should be focusing on the present.

Focus on what you can do now, as well as decisions that will have positive effects now (e.g., lose weight, exercise, good sleep). The positive effects that result from focusing on the present will hopefully carry over to the future.

What You Would Like to Know for Sure

The questions you may want to ask have no definitive answers: How long before you will become disabled? How long before you will have to

stop working? How long will you be able to care for yourself? How long before you need more help? Will you become more disabled than your neighbor? Will it ever get better? The questions are rooted in feelings of anxiety. Uncertainty breeds anxiety.

Set Goals

Set realistic goals for how you can help yourself now. It's somewhat unhealthy to be preoccupied with the uncertain future, because that takes your efforts away from thinking in the present.

Alert

Set goals about your current treatment regimen. Are you satisfied with the response you are having to treatment? If not, how long are you willing to wait before you deem the treatment unsatisfactory? Be prepared to adjust your current treatment plan when necessary.

You should plan for long-term security. Make financial decisions that will bring you a sense of financial security at some point. If losing your job and becoming disabled are your worst-case scenarios, plan for the day and hope it never comes.

If you think you may need a caregiver at some point, plan for the day. It may give you peace to make plans and prepare for every possible contingency, but is it practical to do that?

With eyes wide open, prepare for your future security, but live in the moment. Always focus on improving your current situation. Richard P. Feynman once said, "I can live with doubt and uncertainty. I think it's much more interesting to live not knowing than to have answers which might be wrong." Carpe diem!

Learning to Manage Stress

The demands of everyday life are often stressful. A certain amount of stress is expected, but having a chronic disease such as arthritis can

compound normal stress to a level that can be overwhelming at times. The normal stress response is sometimes referred to as the fight-or-flight response. It is the body's way of physically getting ready to fight back against a stressor, or run from it.

Physical Effects of Stress

The body releases epinephrine from the adrenal gland when it is undergoing a stressful event. The hypothalamus is stimulated to release hormones that increase production of cortisol, and other physical events are initiated by the nervous system. Stress provokes true physical effects, not only emotional effects. When you are stressed, you may experience:

- Muscle tension
- Exhaustion
- Anxiety or feelings of nervousness
- Indigestion or loss of appetite
- Dizziness or headache
- Trouble falling asleep

When you have to go to work, run a household, take care of yourself and your family, and have quality time with friends and family all while you are in pain and feeling run down, arthritis adds an extra dimension to what is already a hectic pace. For people living with arthritis, too much stress can increase pain, fatigue, and depression and make it more difficult to cope with the extra burdens that come with having a chronic disease. Pain leads to stress and stress leads to more pain. It is a cycle you must consciously work to break.

Essential

Not all arthritis patients respond the same to stress. Interestingly, one study revealed that a middle-aged female rheumatoid arthritis patient went into remission following two unexpected deaths in her family. Another

study concluded that stressful life events or bad childhood experiences couldn't be linked to the development of rheumatoid arthritis.

Reduce Stress

Stress management techniques should be part of your arthritis treatment regimen. First and foremost, you need to be cognizant of what causes you to feel stressed. A diary that tracks stressors and physical symptoms in response to the stressor may help you cope with or prevent those situations going forward.

It's an individual thing: What causes stress for one person may not be stressful for you. What relieves stress for one person may not be a stress reliever for you. After identifying your own stressors, follow this advice to help relieve stress:

Vent

Talk to someone and let it out. Keep stress from building up by releasing emotions associated with stress. If you have no one to talk to, write in a journal. Journaling is a great way to get your emotions out. Researchers have found health benefits associated with writing in a journal for just twenty minutes a week over a period of four weeks.

Focus on positive actions. Focus on positive thinking and put your energy into things that build your self-esteem and self-image. Avoid thinking that promotes feelings of depression such as "I can't do it" or "It's more than I can handle."

Take responsibility

If you feel overwhelmed by stress, recognize that you have the power to do something about it. Learn to say no if you feel you've undertaken more than you can truly handle. Learn to recognize when your mood is changing and take action before you feel too depressed. Consciously make the effort to relax.

Simplify and organize

Managing your time more effectively will help you feel less stressed. Don't wear yourself down by doing too much in a day. Spread out your activities and chores and don't forget to schedule rest periods. It's up to you to set manageable goals.

Avoid the sedentary trap

It's easy for you to justify a sedentary lifestyle. You hurt, right? You can't do as much, right? Can't do as much doesn't mean you can't do anything, though. Studies have shown that yoga, Tai Chi, and regular exercise can reduce perceived stress levels.

Be healthy

Eat well, sleep well, avoid alcohol, stay away from carbs and sweets, and take time to employ relaxation techniques. Decide what you find relaxing and do it. Clear your mind, engage in a hobby, or enjoy simple pleasures like walking your dog or reading.

Many people with arthritis will attest to the fact that arthritis itself is stressful, and additional stress makes arthritis symptoms much worse. Be aware of how you respond to stress and be sure to control negative responses to stress for your better health.

Learning to Manage Depression and Anxiety

It's not unusual for you to feel depressed or anxious at times because of changes brought about by having chronic arthritis. Sadness, fear, guilt, anger, and anxiety are normal to a degree.

Depression is a term that is sometimes inappropriately used to refer to sadness or the blues. Depression and sadness are not the same, and it's important to recognize the difference.

Fact

According to the CDC, arthritis is strongly associated with major depression, with an attributable risk of 18.1 percent, most likely through

its role in causing functional limitations.

Depression Symptoms and Risk Factors

It's important to recognize a true depressive disorder, because there is help available. If you have experienced any of the following symptoms on a daily basis for several weeks, talk to your doctor.

- Lack of interest in things you used to enjoy
- Feelings of restlessness
- Feelings of guilt
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Cognitive problems
- Extreme tiredness
- Significant change in appetite, weight loss, or weight gain
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Other physical symptoms such as headache, digestive problems, sexual dysfunction

Also be aware of depression risk factors, which may include previous depressive episodes, especially before age forty; recent stressful events in your life; a family history of depression; alcohol or drug abuse; medical conditions; and lack of a support network.

Coping with Depression

Though you recognize now that temporary feelings of depression and anxiety are normal with chronic pain and arthritis, don't dismiss persistent symptoms of depression and anxiety which need attention. If depressive symptoms are interfering in your daily life, long before the symptoms cross over into thoughts of death or suicide, get professional help. Counseling and medications that help with depression can be lifesavers.

Don't allow yourself to get into the trap of feeling hopeless. Tap into your inner strength and strong will and truly believe that life can still be

happy, pleasurable, productive, and fulfilling despite arthritis.

If you don't feel that way now or have had periods where you didn't feel that way, you may be wondering how to maintain that mindset. First of all, know that it's not always easy, especially when pain and arthritis symptoms are particularly bothersome. It helps to concentrate on what you know deep in your gut such as: It's okay to be imperfect. In a world in which beautiful, high energy, highly accomplished people are celebrated, it's not hard to feel "lesser than." Never forget that the courage it takes to live with chronic pain on a daily basis is itself something to be celebrated.

You are doing the best you can do. In spite of chronic joint symptoms associated with arthritis, you continue to do everything to the best of your ability. Though arthritis steals away parts of your life as you knew it before, there is still a lot about your life that is worth hanging onto and worth your enthusiasm.

Focus on what you can do and what you can change. Don't focus on what you have lost. In your mind, set free those things you have lost. You can easily find yourself depressed if you keep calling up images of how things used to be. Let go of those images. Focus on today and how to make today better; it's not a hopeless situation.

Learning to Adjust and Adapt

The way you used to do a task may no longer be physically possible. Your physical limitations will continually present new challenges. Quite literally, you have two choices, and one of them isn't much of a choice: You can assess what is interfering or intruding on the way you used to do something and find a solution. The other option is to give up before trying to problem-solve.

You will need to continually reinvent yourself and how you think. Accept that the person you were before arthritis is gone. Try not to give that person a second thought. Put your effort into learning to be the best

person you can be under the circumstance of living with a chronic illness. Face your new reality and consciously adjust and adapt to that new reality.

Making Necessary Adjustments

What might need adjusting? Adjust and adapt everything that is no longer working for you. Consider how arthritis has affected your living space. Consider how arthritis has impacted your time. Consider how the disease has affected your close relationships. Don't forget to consider yourself — how has your “normal” existence been affected?

- **Adjust and adapt your environment** — Create handicapped-accessible space. Consider every room that is hard to get into. Consider every piece of furniture that's no longer functional for you. Make sure you create an atmosphere that is calming and comfortable for you.
- **Adjust your schedules** — If you can't keep up with schedules, meetings, or other commitments, you may have to reconsider your obligations. If you have to give up something you used to enjoy doing, fill that time slot with something you can still do. Don't allow a void to be created.
- **Adjust time spent with family and friends** — Find a new routine that allows you to have quality time with family and friends. You may have to change the day you do things together or what you do together, but be sure that whatever you take away is replaced by something doable and enjoyable.

All adjustments should be made so you're not left feeling something or someone is neglected because of you. Concentrate not on taking things away, but on doing things differently.

It's also very important to make mental adjustments, not just physical adjustments: You should adjust your expectations.

How to Remain Inspired

Where you find inspiration is personal and unique to you. Your source of inspiration may not be mine, and vice versa. Generally speaking, you may feel inspired by people who continue to do great things despite facing major obstacles, and others who cause you to be awestruck by their ability to consistently overcome problems.

Essential

People often inspire other people. What is sometimes hard to believe is that you may serve as someone else's inspiration. People observe your courage and achievements against all odds and you give them pause.

People Inspire People

People that inspire usually have a very positive attitude, despite living with some sort of challenge or challenges. They keep coming back, stronger than ever, after being knocked down by their physical illness or other difficult circumstance. They are the ones who rise above it all. You can look to these people as personal heroes and try to emulate their strength of character. Lance Armstrong comes to mind. After battling cancer, he went on to win the Tour de France as he had been doing before developing cancer. Christopher Reeve despite his spinal cord injury, worked tirelessly from his wheelchair, and sometimes from a hospital bed, to make a difference in the lives of those living with paralysis and other disabilities. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, the famous French impressionist painter, continued to paint and produce beautiful art. He made adjustments when necessary, but carried on with his work even after becoming severely crippled. There are myriad examples of men and women who persevered.

Words Inspire People

Sometimes the wisdom of someone's words can inspire. Books of quotations or Web sites about quotations (www.quotegarden.com) can

really affect you in a positive way. You may want to collect meaningful quotations in a journal or notebook. In times when you are feeling down, read through your saved quotations. The words will inspire you over and over again.

- “Pain is inevitable. Suffering is optional.” – M. Kathleen Casey
- “We have no right to ask when sorrow comes, ‘Why did this happen to me?’ unless we ask the same question for every moment of happiness that comes our way.” – Author Unknown
- “We must embrace pain and burn it as fuel for our journey.” – Kenji Miyazawa
- “To have become a deeper man is the privilege of those who have suffered.” – Oscar Wilde

Those quotations are a sampling of words that may touch and inspire you. It’s more significant for you to search for quotes which have deep meaning for you.

Faith

Personal faith is yet another inspiration for many people who are dealing with pain and physical ailments. This is not to promote one religion over another, but only to suggest that your own belief system can serve as your source of inspiration. Many people gain strength and feel inspired by turning to their faith and spirituality. Once again, it’s personal how you choose to inwardly or outwardly express your faith and beliefs.

Living in a Normal World

The goal of every person living with arthritis or another disability is to live as normally as possible. To do that, you must learn how to do things more efficiently and more easily. You must learn how to better organize and plan. You must learn what works best for you and then do it over and over. It's difficult for people with arthritis to give up a hobby or passion because of physical limitations. Perhaps there is no need to give up on anything; perhaps there is just a need to learn a new way.

Traveling with Arthritis

If you had a passion for traveling before you developed arthritis, you won't want the disease to stop you. As with everything, you will need to find ways to simplify the process so you can continue traveling, if that is your desire. Whether traveling by car, train, airplane, or cruise ship, some of the helpful hints apply to all. Other tips are more specific to your mode of transportation.

General Travel Tips

Think of everything you will need for your trip. Plan ahead is the most important tip of all.

You will always need to prepare for how many days you will be gone and make sure you take medications in an organizer that will help you remember to take your pills and when to take them. This is especially important if you are crossing into different time zones.

Also remember to bring extra pills, in case you are delayed for any reason and some snacks so you can be assured you won't have to take pills on an empty stomach.

If you are not staying with family or friends, be sure you reserve a hotel well in advance and confirm that the room is accessible. People with

severe arthritis would most likely be more comfortable in handicapped-accessible rooms. Don't hesitate to inquire about walking distances to and from elevators and dining facilities. Ask about anything that will put your mind at ease. Ask more than once, to be sure you are being given consistent answers.

Alert

It's very convenient and efficient to prepare a checklist of essential items you will keep and refer to each time you travel. By having a prepared checklist, you won't have to recall what you need to take and risk forgetting something when you travel.

Whatever you need at home, you will need when traveling. Do you use bathroom aids, dressing aids, extra pillows? Pack light, but remember necessities that help you manage your arthritis. Consider taking any items which would help you if your symptoms began to flare, such as a heating pad or cane. It's also a good idea to use luggage with wheels, for easier transport.

Traveling by Car

Road trips can take an extra toll if you will be spending a lot of time in the car within the span of a day. Plan for the inevitabilities associated with car travel. Be sure you have your car serviced before you travel so you won't face additional problems from mechanical failure. Just in case, keep your cell phone within reach. Plan frequent rest stops to minimize stiffness. You won't regret taking the extra time to ensure your comfort.

Have extra pillows or a lumbar cushion available so you can adjust your body position as needed. If you have difficulty removing a gas cap, purchase a gas-cap wrench, which has a bigger, ergonomic handle designed to help arthritic hands. Be realistic about how long you can drive or ride in a car — overdoing it will ruin your trip.

Traveling by Plane

Some people with disabilities fear going to the airport because of long lines and travel restrictions that have been in place since 9/11. You shouldn't have to give up airplane travel, but you do have to be well-prepared. The Web site for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) will help you keep up with the list of permitted and prohibited items (www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited), as well as other dos and don'ts.

The TSA also has a section for travelers with disabilities and medical conditions (www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/specialneeds). The information is updated according to changes made, and it's important for you to check before you travel by airplane. Current information is available regarding what disability-related equipment is allowed beyond the security checkpoint once it is screened. Policies regarding removing shoes and carry-on requirements are also updated as necessary.

Other suggestions for airplane travel which may make your trip more comfortable:

- Book nonstop flights when possible to avoid the extra hassle of connecting flights.
- Allow extra time. Rushing through an airport will wear you out and risk injury.
- Request an aisle seat when making your reservation to allow yourself extra leg room.
- If you will have difficulty walking through the airport, request an airport wheelchair or assistance ahead of time by calling your airline. With advance notice, a wheelchair will be waiting for you when you land at your destination.

Tips for Bus, Train, or Cruise-Ship Travel

As with any mode of travel, prepare in advance. As it applies, inquire in advance about the location of restrooms, bedrooms, stairs, elevators, or

the accessibility of aisles. Ask if there is staff or personnel available to offer any special assistance you may require. Inquire how medical emergencies are handled. Here are some further tips:

- Try to schedule trips that require fewer stops or less need to get off and on the bus, train, or ship.
- Try taking shorter excursions at first to see how well you manage.
- Travel with someone else when possible.
- Schedule trips during less hectic or slower travel times — avoid the holiday crush.

Don't let arthritis put unnecessary fear into traveling. Planning ahead and being prepared should make you less reluctant when it comes to traveling. Try to anticipate any problems you may have and find solutions ahead of time. Don't deny that you may have special needs while traveling, because denial may get you into trouble.

Shopping Tips

Cost is important when shopping, but so is convenience for people living with arthritis. You will want to concentrate on conserving your energy while shopping so it doesn't become overwhelming. Focus on what is most problematic for you about the shopping experience and look for ways to simplify.

Home delivery or online shopping may be solutions, but if you're going to do hands-on shopping, consider the following advice:

- Shop at stores that have motorized carts available.
- Use stores you are most familiar with so you can avoid extra walking to find items.
- Stock up on bulky items so you don't have to juggle them each time you shop.

- Have a list prepared, so you can get what you need and get out before you've lost your energy.
- Shop when stores are less busy. Having to dodge people and other shopping carts will surely wear you out faster.
- Take advantage of store personnel who offer to load your car for you.
- Ask packers to put frozen food items together, so when you get home those are carried in first and the rest can wait until you've taken a break.

When shopping in retail stores or discount stores, be aware of where elevators and restrooms are as you enter the store. Don't wait until you are becoming too fatigued to search for them. You will be glad to know in advance.

When shopping for gifts for other people, don't weigh yourself down by carrying an oversized purse. Take things out of your purse that you don't really need to lighten the load. Consider shipping gifts directly to the recipient so you don't have to carry the package. Browsing through stores can be fun, but it helps to know ahead of time what gifts you are thinking of buying. Again, make a list even if you choose to deviate from it at some point.

Essential

Each individual should take what fits their shopping style and personality from the shopping advice. It needs to be about what works best for you, by finding ways to minimize stress. Some people think regifting is a solution. If regifting causes you more stress, then it's not the best solution for you.

Consider, if appropriate, giving one kind of gift for all of the people on your list. For example, get everyone books or get everyone CDs. Narrow your range of gift giving to make it easier on yourself. Consider giving gift cards. The gift card idea makes it easier on you, and the gift

cards are usually well-received because people can ultimately get what they want.

Cooking/Kitchen Work

Most arthritis patients get comfort from eating a good meal, yet have difficulty spending a lot of time in the kitchen preparing the meal. It's important to use cooking techniques which are simple and efficient. Plan meals you enjoy, but plan at least several days ahead. Plan to prepare extra so you can freeze meals and have them ready for those days you don't feel like cooking.

There are myriad cooking gadgets — utensils with built-up handles, lightweight cookware, Teflon pots and pans, and more — which you may find easier to handle. If that's not what you have now, consider it an investment for your better health. If you surround yourself with an accessible kitchen space and arthritis-friendly equipment and dishes, you will be inclined to cook more often and eat better. Here are some kitchen and cooking tips:

- Your stove should have controls on the front of your range so you don't have to reach the back panel to turn it on or off.
- You can buy one of the electric cookware products (e.g., electric fry pan, electric wok, electric grill) and sit while cooking.
- In the summer, outdoor grilling also allows you to sit down while keeping an eye on the barbecue.
- By attaching small casters to the bottom of a cutting board, you can change it into a transporting board, to help you move heavy pots along your counter top to the sink or wherever necessary.
- Boil potatoes before peeling them.
- To peel hard-boiled eggs, run the eggs under cold water after they're done cooking. The shells come off without a struggle.

- To drain cooked spaghetti easily, some people put a colander in the cooking pot then add spaghetti. Once the spaghetti is done cooking, you just need to lift out the colander. There are also pasta pots with strainer holes in the lid.
- Slow cookers or Crock-Pots are very arthritis friendly.
- Use an electric knife to cut meat, especially large roasts.
- Get your store or butcher to pack meat in portions you will use so you don't have to cut them and divide them again before freezing.

Fact

Sign up for a newsletter from a Web site geared toward making cooking easier. You will get tips and recipes delivered to your e-mail, and you won't get stuck in the rut of making the same old meal too many times in any given week. For example, check out Busy Cooks at About.com (<http://busycooks.about.com>).

Once you realize arthritis requires that you do things differently and more simply, don't be afraid to learn how to best accomplish simple living. The examples given only tap the surface of what's available to you. There is so much written about meals in minutes, in large part because busy men and women who work outside the home need that kind of help. You, as a person with chronic arthritis, benefit from the flood of information about quick cooking because you need the same kind of help in the kitchen.

Arthritis-Friendly Hobbies and Activities

The physical and emotional changes caused by living with chronic arthritis may make it necessary for you to change how you do many things, and even require you to give up some. The ultimate blow would be giving up a hobby or activity that is your passion, which hopefully doesn't have to happen. By modifying and adapting the activity, you can probably still participate.

Keeping active with a hobby or activity you enjoy helps your mental outlook, and also helps your range of motion, though it does not replace regular exercise. You have to be careful about overusing joints and increasing pain. At times you are active with your hobby, you may need to adjust analgesic medications. That's something to discuss with your doctor.

Essential

The Arthritis Foundation has suggested that hobbies have a positive effect on people with arthritis by diverting their attention away from pain and other problems associated with the disease. Studies have shown that hobbies have health benefits, both physical and psychological.

You may have more leisure time if you stop working. You will need to fill your time with activities you find relaxing and pleasurable. Many people with arthritis enjoy reading, gardening, playing cards, embroidery, and sewing to name just a few activities. Generally, you will find that adaptive equipment which helps you hold objects will make a big difference in how your hands feel after working at your hobby.

For instance, gardening is made easier by using long-handled garden tools to compensate for reaching. Ergonomic handles on trowels, hand-held hoes, and planting scoops make gardening tasks easier. Raised flower beds also eliminate bending, which is normally required while gardening. Perennial plants rather than annuals require less work.

You will be able to read longer if you rest your book on a level surface. If you like to read in bed, place the book against a wedge pillow or a book holder. Playing cards can be made easier by using card holders or automatic card shufflers.

Embroidery is more easily managed if you use embroidery hoops attached to frames or that can be clamped to a table. Crochet hooks and knitting needles can be hard to maneuver. A nifty trick is to take the

sponge off of hair rollers and slip them over knitting needles to improve your grip. Self-threading sewing needles or sewing machines which have automatic threading features are great for people who love to sew.

Most people with hand arthritis have difficulty gripping. Items with bulkier handles work best, but if you need a quick or temporary solution, try wrapping bubble wrap around something you need to get a handle on. Gripping shelf liner is great for wrapping around thinner handles (e.g., artist tools, sketching pencils) to make them thicker. The shelf liner works well underneath anything that slips away, which is its actual intended use.

Before giving up your favorite hobby, be creative and innovative when trying to find alternative ways that will allow you to continue enjoying it. Ergonomic equipment has become very popular, so it is not that hard to find. Some hobbies like dancing or boating may be harder to continue. It's important not to give up a hobby unless you absolutely have no other option. It is critical to replace any activity or hobby you have to give up with another. You may be replacing it with a more sedentary activity in some cases, but it's important to occupy your time with something else you enjoy doing. Give yourself a chance to develop new passions. Your pain, stress, and negative emotions will be less if you keep yourself truly interested in one or more activities.

Asking for Help

Change is never easy, and finding new ways of doing things can be a challenge. However, you may find the most difficult aspect of living with arthritis is asking for help. Some people have an easier time asking for help than others. You may feel it's a strike against your independence. You may feel you are imposing on someone or being a burden. The harsh reality is that you need help and you need to adjust your thinking to find that acceptable.

Fact

It may seem counterintuitive, but you're actually helping others when you ask for their help. People feel good about themselves when they help someone — it boosts their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth. A good deed benefits both the one receiving the help and the one offering the help.

Asking for help is not a sign of weakness; it's part of the human condition. Every person needs some help from time to time.

Your family and friends often don't know what to do and actually feel helpless. If they can relieve some of your pain and make things less difficult, they want to do just that. They want nothing more than to be able to help.

Only ask for help when you absolutely need it. Do what you can do first before asking for help. If asking is somehow embarrassing to you, do it discretely. The kindest thing you can do for the person from whom you need help is to give advance notice. Try not to surprise them with a to-do list. Usually, people who are given enough time to plan for it and adjust their own schedules genuinely don't mind helping.

Try to package together the chores you need help with so your helper can get more done in one visit. Be reasonable though; the more time that passes before you ask for help, the longer your list grows. Try to address things in a reasonable amount of time so that you don't overload your helper with things to do.

Most people only need a thank you to feel good about helping you. An expression of sincere appreciation is the only form of repayment necessary. If you feel compelled to do more than just offer a sincere thank you, do something special and memorable for the person. Send flowers, bake a pie, take the person to the movies, or buy their dog some dog treats. Choose a gesture that shows how much you value their time and friendship.

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