



# Strategies for Osteoarthritis in the Home

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## Simple Changes People With OA Can Make Around the Home

People with osteoarthritis (OA) face countless challenges on a daily basis, and one of the most frequently encountered issues is simply maneuvering through your home. The home is usually thought of as a place of comfort and relaxation, but it can be a difficult environment to navigate and maintain for people with OA.

Shortly after I developed arthritis of the spine, I ended up moving into an apartment and living on my own for the first time. Although I was thrilled to finally be on my own, I soon realized that taking care of my living environment was difficult because of my physical limitations.

I struggled with simple tasks and became overwhelmed in a place I called home. I eventually came up with a few strategies over the years that I found helpful for dealing with osteoarthritis in the home.

Here are a few of the simple changes around the home that can be made to help you on a daily basis.

### **Pace Yourself**

For most people, chores around the home are a mundane, yet very manageable, aspect of daily life. However, for someone suffering from OA, they can become monumental challenge.

I personally struggle with anything that requires prolonged standing, such as washing dishes. Every time I would try to stand hunched over the sink washing dishes for a prolonged period of time, my back would tighten up and I would need to go sit down for a while to relieve the discomfort.

Eventually I shortened the process and would bring a chair into the kitchen so I could take periodic breaks between dishes before the pain would set in. Another option is if I have a busy day I will do the dishes in increments.

Similarly, other chores or activities that aren't time sensitive can be split up into portions to spare your joints the continuous exertion — going up and down the stairs multiple times over the course of an entire day will be a lot easier than doing it all in one hour.

I realize that not all activities can be split up and some need to be done right away, but pacing yourself is a great way to still be able to achieve many of your daily activities.

### **Keep Items Within Reach**

Having an item within reach can be highly dependent on where in your body the OA is located. The arthritis in my spine prevents me from being able to bend backwards, downwards, and sideways without it becoming an unpleasant experience.

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Because of my limited range of motion, I try to avoid putting items in lower cabinets and shelves. It's a simple solution but it has helped me immensely.

If the arthritis is located in some of the more peripheral joints, like your shoulder, wrist, or fingers, it might be more helpful to have the items placed so it's not required for you to reach in a manner that exacerbates your pain.

As you might be able to imagine, not every single object in my home can be within my reach (wouldn't that be great though?). For those few things I can't casually reach, I have my lovely wife help me out or I get creative.

### **Get Creative!**

Having a robot that could help do all the activities around the house would be awesome, but until that day comes, you and I are going to need to come up with creative solutions to circumvent our physical limitations.

One of the very weird ways I have gotten creative over the years is by honing in my toe-grabbing skills. For those few items I still need to grab at home that are near ground level, I have learned to use my toes to grasp them fairly well.

It took a while (and there were many accidents along the way), but it has helped me immensely in my home environment. I weird people out, but I hardly ever need to reach down to pick up items.

Before you judge me (it might be too late), we as humans can be very resourceful. Whether this means using your feet more, learning to become ambidextrous, or creating a tool to help you, the most challenging activities of daily life can be supplemented with some creativity!

### **Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help**

I am not afraid to ask my wife for help, and you shouldn't be afraid to ask for help either!

It can also be embarrassing and humiliating at first to ask for help — especially if it's an activity that is easily done by most people. I have learned the hard way that sucking up your pride and asking for help when appropriate can make your day run much smoother.

Help can come in the form of obvious choices, such as your spouse, sibling, or friend. It can also come from companies that specialize in assisting individuals with physical limitations to live their lives.

These companies will send someone to assist you with everyday chores that have become difficult due to your arthritis. Similarly, occupational therapists can help to teach you strategies on being able to navigate through the house and succeed in doing your activities of daily living.

One of the most difficult aspects of living with osteoarthritis is being faced with the fact that you struggle with an activity at home most people can do without blinking. I face obstacles in my home environment every day that I have slowly learned to get around with a few strategies.

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