A New Way of Overcoming Daily Obstacles With OA

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How to Live With Osteoarthritis

When you have a chronic pain condition like osteoarthritis, your daily life is impacted in hundreds of little ways. Even before you have been formally diagnosed, your body has probably been making tiny adjustments and adaptations without you being overtly aware of it.

From opening a window to tying your shoes, osteoarthritis can demand changes to your everyday routine. Since a great number of people manage OA in their knees or hips, many of the following suggestions focus on mobility tips.

However, we all know that there is plenty of OA to go around in hands, wrists, shoulders, and ribs, not to mention our companion symptom: fatigue. You're going to want to identify ways to prioritize your daily activities proactively, so you don't inadvertently yourself into a flare-up.

Identify Priority Movement

Every step counts. When you are looking to make adjustments in your daily routine to support your OA management, you need to remember that every step counts.

Before I learned this lesson (and sometimes long after learning it), I've had to simply stop walking until I could determine the most efficient way to continue and not "waste" any steps.

It feels like the opposite of what the Fitbit tracker does for you: you don't want any steps that you don't need because you need to save and spend them wisely.

Delegating Chores

Even if you live alone, there are ways to reduce or eliminate chores that can save you valuable steps. This may take a shift in how you approach daily tasks like food shopping, cleaning, cooking, and laundry.

Many people feel strongly that they "should" be able to do these tasks themselves. I'm not going to try to convince you otherwise, but there will be times you just cannot complete these tasks.

Consider some of the following suggestions for support when you are recovering from surgery, a flare-up, or are battling a cold.

- **Laundry Services:** depending on where you live, for a small fee you can have your laundry picked up and dropped off at your local laundromat. If that's not a possibility, try to have your laundry room on the same floor to avoid trying to carry laundry up and down a flight of stairs. Ask for help from family members if stairs are unavoidable and only make necessary trips.

- **Food Delivery:** food shopping is a strenuous activity for me sometimes. Taking advantage of a food delivery service can be worth the cost. Peapod (from Stop&Shop) is one I've had a lot of luck with, and am curious about trying the dinner prep ones. Amazon Fresh is also getting good reviews, but I've yet to try it myself.
- **Cooking:** the best advice I have for cooking with OA is to plan well. Always make a little more than you need so that you have a quick serving of leftovers when you're drained during the week. Meal prepping on Sunday is ideal but if you're in the midst of a flare-up may seem overwhelming. Have easy snacks on hand (nuts, fruit) that you can grab quickly without having to expend a lot of energy on.

Mobility Tools

At some point in your OA journey, you are most likely going to seek out ways to help get around a little more easily than before. I know I waited much too long to take advantage of any mobility support due to feelings of insecurity and acceptance.

When I realized I was missing out on things I simply stopped doing because of the pain I have walking, I knew I needed to do something about it. Mainly because I look on the younger side, I felt as though I was "cheating" somehow by not pushing through the pain.

Don't stop going to museums, casinos, malls or walks along the beach because of pride. It's not worth it.

Scooters

Don't just think "Walmart" as I did! A mobility scooter can be the difference between continuing to do what you love and staying home. Everyone that I have come into contact with using my scooter has been helpful, polite, and friendly. Many insurances may cover a portion, and if you save up, it's worth it!

Canes

You can get a cane at most local pharmacies or of course, online. On a hard day at work, a cane gives me the help I need to get around safely. It's easy for knees to buckle even up just a few steps, and sometimes the scooter isn't practical. If you need it, use it. You won't regret it.

Helping Hands

If you have osteoarthritis in your hands or fingers, the first thing you want to do is call your pharmacy and ask for easy to open pill bottles. Nothing is worse than trying to take the medicine that's supposed to help you, and you can't open it! Once you have the bottle opened, you can transfer the pills to a box system for the week that is easy to open.

Adding some cylindrical foam or a hair roller to your fork or toothbrush can give help you with your grip and can help push buttons in the kitchen. Also, be sure to switch to a dictation tool on your computer whenever possible to give your wrists a break from the keyboard.

Mind and Body

Being as proactive as you can with your approach to osteoarthritis will get easier with practice. You need to carve out just a little time at the start and end of your day to relax, pray, or meditate. If you're shaking your head as you read this, remember, I was there! You need to take the time, or the time will take you, usually in the form of a flare-up.

With the steps you save, remember to devote your physical activity to your physical therapy regimen. Even if it's light stretching or yoga, you need to do something every day to give your body the strength and mobility it needs more than ever. Working with a physical therapist can be very helpful, as they can provide other exercises that target your specific needs.

Whatever you do, don’t be afraid to ask for help throughout your day. You will be surprised how many people are happy to help, and you can find creative ways to get around your day just a little bit easier. Connect with other people managing arthritis for new ideas, and be kind to yourself.