How to Manage Osteoarthritis in Hands and Feet

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Navigating Mobility

Osteoarthritis comprises more than one hundred diseases and is the most common form of arthritis. It occurs when the cartilage breaks down between the joints, resulting in pain, swelling and stiff joints. This condition can keep an OA sufferer from doing many things that s/he used to enjoy. It can be frustrating and disheartening for the person who is afflicted. We'll be taking a look at some osteoarthritis management options.

There are ways to manage OA in the hands and feet so that you can still get out and enjoy the activities you used to. Here are some tips on getting your life back:

1. **Exercise:** Exercising the joints and muscles will help increase the range of motion and help with flexibility. Avoid any type of activity if your joint is tender, injured or inflamed since you don't want to aggravate the condition. Never overdo exercise where you are sore, even two hours afterward.
2. **Work toward a healthy weight:** Excess body weight adds stress to feet.
3. **Eat healthy:** Try to eat more vegetables, whole grains and fruit. If you know there is a food or foods that aggravate your arthritis, don't eat them. Omega 3s are a good antioxidant to include in your diet as it has anti-inflammatory properties.
4. **Rest as needed:** Rest when you are fatigued. Arthritis can make people prone to muscle weakness, so take a nap or rest.
5. **Don't do things that aggravate the condition:** Don't carry a clutch purse, and use a device that opens the jars without requiring the use of your hands in a twisting motion. The more you avoid straining your hands, the better.
6. **Spread the work over two hands:** Instead of carrying something heavy with one hand, use two.
7. **Use heat for pain relief:** You should invest in a paraffin warmer if you do not have one. This allows you to put your aching hands into a warm paraffin soak where it adheres to your hand, all the while penetrating the joints with warmth. You just peel it off when it cools. A warm bath or shower is another way to offer warmth to your hands and feet. A hot pack or heating pad works, too, but make sure it doesn't get too hot and burn your skin. If you are diabetic, avoiding such burns while using a heating pad is important.
8. **Cold packs for dulling pain:** It may decrease muscle spasms. If you have poor circulation, it is not recommended to apply a cold pack.
9. **Wear shoes that support your feet:** Wear comfortable, cushioned shoes that support your weight.
10. **Practice relaxation:** You may want to give guided imagery a try or perhaps deep breathing exercises. Anything that promotes muscle relaxation will help alleviate pain.
11. **Keep a positive attitude:** You are in charge of your disease, not vice versa.
12. **Use supportive devices as needed:** Use braces or other health aides that will help you maintain an active lifestyle.
13. **Medications:** Be sure to take them regularly so that you stay on top of the pain.
14. **Topical pain relievers:** You can use any over-the-counter topical medications that help arthritic pain and help reduce inflammation.

Stepping Forward

While osteoarthritis can present significant challenges, there are various effective management strategies available to help individuals lead fulfilling lives with reduced pain and improved mobility. From maintaining a healthy weight and engaging in regular exercise to utilizing assistive devices and exploring medication options, there are numerous approaches tailored to each individual's needs.