



Helpful Home Hacks for Living With Osteoarthritis

by ANGELA FINLAY

How Your Living Space Can Help With Arthritis Management

Living with osteoarthritis (OA) can be a chore, especially if your home isn't set up properly. Of course, not everybody can afford an arthritis-friendly renovation, but that's all right: a bit of foresight and some creative alterations can make your living space noticeably better for your sore joints.

Gripping, bending, twisting, and lifting tend to be the most strenuous movements for OA sufferers, so consider these home life hacks that aim to ease the pain and strain that come with your everyday routine.

Organize Well to Ease your Pain

The way you store things may seem arbitrary, but finding the best place for each item will add up to a lot less gripping, bending, and straining at the end of the day, and that means fewer arthritis symptoms.

Begin with the rooms you use the most – namely the bathroom, kitchen, and bedroom – and consider which things deserve to take center-stage.

Get Clever With Your Closets

Everything you use most often should be in easy reach as soon as you open the door. For your bedroom closet, this means keeping the clothing, accessories, and shoes you wear most often between waist height and shoulder height (on big, smooth hangers to make things even easier to grab and put back).

For your kitchen pantry, shift the shelves to allow more room in the middle, so you can stock all your favourite dry goods there. Use smaller containers – they are lighter and easier to lift and use, which takes strain off your joints. You can still buy in bulk, but make a point to transfer some of each product to a smaller basket or jar, and keep it within arms-reach.

Get Rid of Clutter

The more you have, the more you have to store, and the more inconvenient storage space you'll need. Instead of pushing stuff to the back of your cupboards and closets, go through your belongings and get rid of anything you don't use often enough.

When it comes to your wardrobe, anything you haven't worn in the past year can probably go (excluding very special garments), and you can probably downsize each and every closet to one rack, one row, and one shelf of useable items.

Next page: tips for using your living space wisely.

Organize Well to Ease your Pain

Another bonus to owning less is cleaning less and moving things less often, which amounts to less work for your sore joints.

Use your Living Space Wisely

The way you move around your abode can make for a safer and easier home life. In some cases, you may need to upgrade certain fixtures, like replacing door knobs with levers for better grip, but in many cases, better organization and less mess is your first step to more comfort.

A few cheap and clever adjustments can help your space work better for you:

Exercise Your Legs and Hips

You certainly don't need a gym to stay in good shape and prevent disastrous falls – you have all the tools you need in the comfort of your own home.

Do seated marches and leg raises each day at the same time – perhaps when you sit down to breakfast, or else before you get up from the table – and hold the back of the couch or an arm chair for support as you rise up onto your toes for a few sets of calf toning reps.

The more active you are now, the more active you will continue to be, so use all the resources around you for a home exercise routine.

Get Into the Tub

Even if you're not a bath person, adding a soak or two each week can help a lot with your pain, especially if you use Epsom salts. The sodium and magnesium in Epsom salt can be absorbed through the skin, and have been shown to reduce pain and inflammation.

Adding a few drops of lavender essential oil can help you relax even more, or if you want to energize your sore muscles for the day ahead, a small dose of peppermint oil will both soothe and invigorate your body.

Next page: custom cold packs and taping the floor.

Use your Living Space Wisely

Make Custom Cold Packs

You've likely heard that heat and cold therapy can soothe your aching joints. Fortunately, you can make your own ice packs – as big or as small as you want – with a few simple ingredients.

Take a Ziploc bag of your choice and fill with a solution of two parts water and one part alcohol, or else use a viscous liquid like dish soap or corn syrup. The packs can live in your freezer, and will mould to your knee, elbow, wrist or ankle perfectly for quick relief.

Get a Little Lift

Standing up from a chair, bench, or toilet seat can be a real pain in the knees. Instead of struggling to shift your weight each time you sit and stand, consider using a seat lift for your chair, and a raised toilet seat for the bathroom.

Sitting a few inches higher may be all you need to stand up without pain, and considering how many times you sit

and stand throughout the day, that can really make a difference come bedtime.

Tape up Your Floor

Trips lead to falls, and falls are a major health hazard when you live with OA. It's a good idea to replace worn out or frayed carpets and have any uneven floorboards repaired, but some well-placed tape can help, too. Use bright red or blue tape (you'll tend to notice these colors quickly) along the front edge of each stair, any uneven spot on the floor, and before any doorjamb to remind yourself of the tripping hazard.

Conclusion

There are plenty of ways to make little movements more manageable, but first you'll have to determine your priorities. Is bending the most difficult, or do you have more trouble reaching? You can certainly work up to a whole home makeover, but be sure to begin with the areas and tasks that challenge you most often, and demand the most of your muscles and joints.