

Mary Pack Arthritis Program
Occupational Therapy

Joint Protection for Shoulders

What is Joint Protection?

Joint protection means supporting and using your joints in well-aligned, comfortable positions. It also means performing everyday activities in ways that reduce the pain or strain on your joints.

How to Protect Your Shoulders:

- Respect pain. If a specific activity increases your pain, try to avoid it or change the way you do that activity. Also, reduce the time you spend doing an activity if your pain lasts for an hour after you have stopped.
- Avoid holding your arms in raised positions for prolonged periods of time. Consider changing the height of your work surface to decrease stress on your shoulder joints.
- Avoid using repetitive arm movements, especially abrupt back and forth motions. Instead use a smooth, circular movement during activities such as washing a car or dusting furniture. Switch from one activity to another frequently to avoid pain and fatigue.
- Avoid weight-bearing through your arms and use adaptive equipment if needed:
 - Getting on and off a chair: try a high, firm chair, a raised cushion or chair blocks.
 - Getting in and out of the bathtub: use the shower or try a bath chair.
 - Getting on and off the toilet: try using a raised toilet seat.

Suggestions for Daily Activities:

1. Dressing:
 - Wear loose fitting clothing. Avoid tight turtlenecks and pullover sweaters.
 - Dress your most painful arm first and undress it last.
2. Grooming:
 - Try adapted equipment to extend your reach, such as a long-handled comb, brush or sponge.

3. Working:

Storage:

- Try to avoid over-reaching. Plan your worktop and storage areas so that items you use frequently are stored close to you, at a convenient height (between your shoulders and your knees).
- Heavy objects should not be kept on high shelves.

Surface Height:

- Your work surface is too high if it causes you to raise or hike your shoulders. Your desk height is correct if your shoulders are held in a relaxed position when your elbows are bent to 90° and your forearms are supported on your desk.
- If you need to work above shoulder level, position yourself as close as you can to your work, e.g. sit on a high stool to work at a bench or use a stepstool to reach an item from a shelf.

4. Carrying Heavy Objects:

- Use a wheeled trolley or cart.
- Use lightweight equipment.
- Lift and carry items close to your body, using both arms.
- Use a “fanny” pack, a backpack with a hip belt or pockets to carry items.

5. Sleeping:

- If your shoulder is painful at night, use a pillow to support the full length of your arm or try a body pillow.
- Avoid sleeping on the same side as your painful shoulder. If both shoulders are painful and you are not comfortable sleeping on your back, try a partial or “three-quarter” side lying position with a pillow behind your back to support hold you.
- A 2-inch thick foam pad on top of your mattress can help to accommodate the painful, bony parts of your shoulder joints.