

Hand exercises for inflammatory arthritis

The aim of these exercises is to maintain strength, movement and function in your hands.

Don't worry if you are unable to manage the full movement/exercise. Just try to get as close to doing the exercises shown in the picture as you can.

To begin with, try doing the following exercises 5 times each, once a day for each hand:

1.



Start with your hand/fingers straight. Then, bend the fingers at your knuckles while keeping the top two joints of each finger in a straight line. Hold for 5 seconds.

2.



Start with your hand/fingers straight.

a) With your knuckles straight, bend the top two finger joints. Try to touch the bottom of your fingers with your finger tips.

b) Next, bend your fingers at your knuckles, but keep the top finger joints straight while trying to touch the base of your palm with your fingertips.

c) Bend all of the fingers into a fist

Hold each position for 5 seconds.

3.



Start with your hand/fingers flat on a table. In turn, walk each finger towards your thumb and hold for 5 seconds.

Lift your hand off the table and put it back down before repeating the exercise. *Do not walk your fingers away from your thumb.*

4.



Start with your hand/fingers flat on a table. Spread all of your fingers out. Hold for 5 seconds. Lift your hand off the table and put it back down before repeating the exercise.

5.



Move your wrists around in the direction indicated by the arrows.

6.



Extend your wrists with your hands in a fist. Hold for 5 seconds.

Don't worry if you do not have any therapy elastic as shown in the picture. Just practice the movement.

To begin with, try doing the following strengthening exercises 8-10 times each, once a day.

The amount of effort going into these exercises should feel moderate. You should not be pushing yourself too hard.

7.



Squeezing something soft.
This can be a very squishy stress ball or a baby bath sponge.

8.



Pinching something soft between your thumb and index finger.
Don't worry if you do not have therapy putty as shown in the picture. You can do this exercise using a baby bath sponge.

9.



Put your hand flat on the table.
Squeeze something very soft between each finger.
Don't worry if you do not have therapy putty as shown in the picture.
You can do this exercise using a piece of bath sponge.

Further tips and frequently asked questions:

You may find it useful to keep an exercise diary to keep a record of when you have completed the exercises and how many you managed to do of each.

Q: What if I find the exercises too difficult or painful?

A: Start by doing fewer repetitions. You may want to split the exercises up, for example by doing half in the morning and half in the afternoon.

Q: Do I do the exercises during a flare?

A: You should still attempt the exercises to maintain range of movement and strength. However, you may need to reduce the number of repetitions or the amount of effort you are putting into exercises 7,8 and 9.

Grading up the exercises:

Once you have managed to comfortably and consistently manage to do the exercises for a week or so, you can gradually increase them in steps.

Exercises 1-6

Once you have managed to comfortably and consistently manage to do 5 repetitions, see if you can do some more.

Step 1: Try to increase up to 10 repetitions. You do not need to do 10 straight away. You might want to start with 6 and build up over time.

Step 2: Once you have managed to comfortably and consistently manage 10 repetitions, you can increase the time you hold each position for up to 10 seconds.

Exercises 7-9

Step 1: Once you have managed 10 repetitions of each exercise comfortably and consistently, try gradually increasing this to two sets of 10.

Step 2: Once you are comfortably managing two sets of these exercises, slightly increase the amount of effort you are putting into them.

Any questions, please contact Rheumatology Occupational Therapy at the Freeman Hospital: 0191 2137677