

Living With Arthritis: Your Room-by-Room Guide



If you or a loved one is living with arthritis, you know how the condition can affect many aspects of life. This is especially true when it comes to the home. Completing what were once menial tasks can become burdensome. Here we take you on a room-by-room tour of your house and provide tips to make living in these spaces easier.

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Your Room-by-Room Guide

In the Kitchen

Cooking takes a variety of fine motor skills that can be especially difficult if you suffer from arthritis. That said, there are a variety of tools and tips you can utilize to keep cooking productive and enjoyable:



- 1. Rearrange your kitchen.** Without a properly laid-out kitchen, your arthritis can become an issue. Be sure that unnecessary bending is eliminated by hanging your pots and pans. Also, invest in storage containers that are easy to open and can be stored in cabinets or on your countertop. Finally, rearrange your cabinets so that the heavier items are on the bottom and the lighter ones on top. Assess your kitchen honestly, and try to make your movements in the space easier.
- 2. Go-gadget-go.** Certain gadgets and tools are designed especially for people who have arthritis. The following tools are suggested by the Arthritis Foundation and ArthritisSupplies.com:
 - “The Garlic Zoom” turns minced garlic from a chopping chore to a simple roll of the device.
 - “Magnetic Measuring Cups” will eliminate the time and effort spent looking through cluttered drawers.
 - “The Easy Grip” jar opener’s no-slip grip is ideal for those with weak, arthritic, or injured hands.
 - Food processors, stand up mixers, and electric jar openers will cut down on the amount of work necessary to perform kitchen tasks.
- 3. One pot meals** are an easy way to eliminate steps that can be a burden on your arthritis, without removing flavor. Crock pots are especially good for this purpose. Simply place meat, fresh or frozen vegetables, liquid and spices, in the pot. Set the timer and let cook until done.
- 4. Choose the right knife.** Make sure your knives are ergonomically correct. They should have large handles for an easy grip.
- 5. Wash your hands.** Warm, soapy water can help relieve any soreness or stiffness that may have occurred during cooking.

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Your Room-by-Room Guide

In the Bathroom

Every year, thousands of falls and injuries occur in the bathroom. When the stiffness of arthritis hinders your movements, you are put at an increased risk. To ensure your safety, follow these tips:



When Bathing...

1. Try to use a stand-up shower rather than a bathtub. Lifting your leg to get into the tub can put you at an increased risk of falling.
2. Use non-slip mats to provide some traction on an otherwise slippery surface.
3. Install assistive devices, such as a bath seat and support bars, to provide relief if you're experiencing a flare-up or are feeling tired or weak.
4. Use liquid soap if you have arthritis in your hands. Having to hold a bar of soap will put unneeded pressure on your joints, while liquid soap can be spread with the palm of your hand.

When Using the Toilet...

1. Use a raised seat or purchase an elevated toilet. Sitting down and getting up can be difficult if you have arthritis in your knees. These products can make the process easier.
2. Install a shelving unit for toilet paper, wipes, and towels to avoid unnecessary bending.

When Cleaning...

1. Use a brush with an extended handle to prevent bending that could put you at risk of falling.
2. Clean immediately after your shower or bath; the steam makes it easier to remove soap and grime and takes the stress off your joints.

Visit QualityHealth's Arthritis Health Center



Get comprehensive information on various types of arthritis, plus find tips on how to manage pain, swelling, fatigue, and more.

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Your Room-by-Room Guide

In the Bedroom

Your bedroom should be a place of respite; however, arthritis can make it difficult to carry out everyday tasks. These tips can help bring ease to your morning and evening routine.



- 1. Getting dressed.** The movements associated with getting dressed can be particularly taxing for arthritis sufferers. The Arthritis Foundation offers the following advice:
 - Start by taking a seat when putting on pants, socks, and shoes. This will alleviate any stress you're putting on your lower body.
 - Buttons and laces can be difficult if you have arthritis in your hands. Opt for Velcro or elastic bands whenever possible.
 - Additionally, you may want to wear larger clothing for an easier time getting them on and off.
 - Finally, look into purchasing sock and shoe aides. These will eliminate any bending or stooping.
- 2. Making the bed each morning is a must for many.** These tips will make the process easier.
 - Cut the process into quarters. Focus on each corner of the bed as four small jobs. This way, reaching is cut to a minimum and each corner can be tucked and folded properly.
 - Use tools. If perfect tucks are a necessity, use household tools like a wooden spoon or kitchen spatula to force the covers under the mattress.
 - Eliminate any steps that you can. If you can do without the top sheet, then remove it. If not, try to combine the top sheet and comforter with Velcro to cut down on the amount of time and movements it takes to make the bed.
- 3. Getting in and out.** Again, your bed should be a place where you go to rest and where you wake up well-rested. However, if arthritis makes getting in and out of bed difficult, invest in a bedside step stool. This will alleviate some of the effort it takes to move about. Additionally, if sitting up is becoming a chore, tying a rope to the foot of the bed to gain some leverage may be a step to consider.

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Your Room-by-Room Guide

In the Yard

When you're suffering from the aching and stiffness associated with arthritis, it's hard to imagine doing anything strenuous—let alone participating in an intense workout. However, it's especially important for those with rheumatoid arthritis to remain active. The American Council of Exercise (ACE) provides the following rationale:



1. Flexibility training helps improve range of motion and reduces stiffness in afflicted joints, particularly the early-morning stiffness often associated with arthritis.
2. Aerobic exercise, particularly low-impact activities such as walking, not only improves overall fitness, but also helps reduce the psychological and emotional pain that can accompany arthritis.
3. Strength training exercises help build muscle strength, enhance joint stability, and improve mobility making easier to perform activities of daily living.
4. Weight-bearing (e.g., walking) or weight-loading (e.g., strength training) exercise positively affect bone mass, helping to reduce the risk of developing osteoporosis, a degenerative bone disease that is often seen in people with arthritis due to their reduced levels of physical activity.
5. Arthritis can negatively affect posture, balance and coordination, all of which may be improved by regular exercise.
6. Excess weight (especially in the form of extra body fat) places additional strain on the joints, so maintaining a healthy body weight is very important for those with arthritis. Along with a sensible diet, exercise plays a key role in helping individuals maintain normal body weight levels.
7. Exercise has been shown to help manage stress, which can take its toll on the whole body, including the joints.
8. Because it is a chronic degenerative disease, arthritis can cause people to become depressed and develop a poor self-image. People who exercise, however, are less likely to be depressed and tend to possess more positive mental outlooks.
9. Painful joints can make getting a good night's sleep difficult. Regular exercise has been shown to improve overall sleep patterns and may help lessen this problem.
10. Because arthritis frequently leads to a more sedentary lifestyle, individuals with this condition are often at an increased risk of developing other significant health problems, such as heart disease and diabetes. Staying active and exercising regularly is an effective means of not only controlling the effects of arthritis, but also of minimizing or eliminating the risk of developing a variety of other lifestyle-related diseases.

Your Room-by-Room Guide

How to Exercise Effectively

1. Stretch. Slow, easy stretches can help alleviate stiffness. What's more, according to the Missouri Arthritis Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (MAARTC), exercise keeps joints flexible, strengthens muscles, and improves overall fitness and your ability to do daily activities.



2. Start slow. Don't push yourself to a point during that feel uncomfortable. Listening to your body is essential to preventing injury and reaping the benefits of a workout.

3. Choose the right exercises. Not all exercises are created equal, and this is especially true if you have arthritis. Be sure that the movements you're performing are benefiting your condition. The following exercises come are recommended by the Arthritis Foundation:

- Walking may be the easiest and most beneficial exercise you can perform. A moderately paced, 30-minute walk will burn calories, while keeping your joints loose and mobile.
- Cycling is another fantastic way to push your muscles without putting too much pressure on your joints. Be it a stationary bike in front of your television or a leisurely ride with the family, cycling can provide you with the movements necessary to help your symptoms.
- Water aerobics will help get your heart rate up without taxing your joints. Because the water supports the body's weight, the amount of stress put on the body is minimized. Still, the resistance provided by the water will allow you to strengthen and build muscle. Enjoy swimming? Then, go for it. Doing a few laps will provide similar benefits.
- Tai Chi can provide arthritis relief with its gentle movements. The ancient Chinese exercise focuses on the body's natural, low-impact movements to improve balance, reduce stress, and increase energy. Tai Chi a bit too slow-paced for you? Try yoga to get similar results.

4. Turn household duties into a workout. The movements and lifting associated with your average chore is not unlike many exercises you'd perform at the gym. If you have leaves to rake, a bathroom to clean, or laundry to do, you can put on some music and pick up the pace in order to break a mild sweat while completing housework. Be sure to lift with your legs, bend at the knee, and stop when you're feeling any amount of pain.

5. Cool down. One of the biggest fitness mistakes people make is not allowing themselves adequate time to cool down afterward. So be sure to take at least 10 minutes for stretching and deep breathing.