Joint Protection For Rheumatoid Arthritis

Joint protection involves doing your everyday activities and work with as little strain and stress to arthritic joints as possible. Using your body in “normal” ways will often put stress on joints that are affected by arthritis. By using joint protection methods, you may reduce pain, save energy and prevent unnecessary strain to joints while still being as active as possible.

Respect pain
Be aware of pain. It is a signal from your body that something is wrong. If you can, locate where you hurt and what brought on the pain. Allow the painful joint to rest. If pain lasts longer than one hour after the activity, reduce the effort or amount of work you put into the activity, or change your way of doing the activity so that it does not cause pain.

Balance rest and work
Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic, long-term disease. It affects your whole body and often causes you to feel more tired and have less energy. Your disease will alternate being “active” and “quiet” so that you may feel good some days and not so good on others. The amount of rest you need each day may be related to how active your disease is that day.

You need at least 10 to 12 hours of rest for your whole body in one 24-hour period. Brief rest periods during the day, between work, for your whole body or for certain parts, may add to this amount. Rest for certain joints when they are painful is very important and can help to reduce joint inflammation. Using the joint when you feel a lot of pain increases the possibility of causing internal stress.

Use positions that do not tend to be stressful to involved joints
Normal tasks can put strain on joints especially small joints of the hands. Although normal joints are not affected by these everyday stresses, joints that have swelling, redness, warmth, and other arthritic changes are affected by such stress. Joint strain may be caused by internal stress of muscles not being in balance or by external stress of the way you use your joints. Avoid tight gripping and twisting motions with your hands as these stresses may lead to problems with finger alignment. By slightly changing the way you do tasks, you may eliminate the pain, discomfort, and deformity caused by this external and internal stress.

Change positions often so as to avoid one position for a long period of time
When you keep your arms, hands, legs or other joints in the same position for a long time, the joints become stiff and muscles strained and tired. Keep your joints moving and flexible.

Consider using adaptive equipment to reduce joint stress
Adaptive devices are available for most daily activities and can help you have less pain, protect your joints and be more independent. Your therapist can recommend devices that would be most helpful to you.