

# Keeping your hands healthy



The most effective way to keep your hands in great shape is to continue doing the activities you do every day. This ensures your hands are strong enough to complete the things you like to do.

## **Here are a few everyday activities that keep your joints moving and help maintain hand strength:**

- Cooking – carrying pots and pans, cutting food, and pouring milk.
- Gardening – pruning your plants, pulling weeds, and digging soil.
- Washing the car – wringing out the sponge, scrubbing, and wiping windows.
- Hanging the washing – pinching pegs, and folding clothes.

Hand exercise are often used as a strategy to manage arthritis. You can use exercises to help reduce stiffness, improve strength, and improve range of motion in your hands. It's important to remember that muscle and joint pain after activity that lasts more than two hours means you may have done too much, too quickly.

## **Helpful tips**

- If your joints are inflamed, you need to rest them. The amount and type of rest will depend on how inflamed your joints are.
- Rest does not always mean lying down. It can also mean changing your posture, wearing your splint, or doing a different activity.
- Avoid movements that cause joint pain. Jar openers, tap turners, and other assistive products help to alleviate stress on your joints.
- If you joints are stiff, you need to exercise them.
- If your joints are weak and unstable, they require more support. A splint can protect painful joints during certain activities. An occupational therapist can advise whether hand splints could help you.

# Helpful products for healthy hands

There are a variety of assistive products available that are designed to make everyday tasks easier. These include:



1. Jar or can openers



2. Key turners



3. Easy grip utensils



4. Button hooks, zipper pulls, and dressing sticks



5. Long handled shoehorns



6. Velcro fasteners

# Exercises for healthy hands

Here are a few basic exercises to get you started. If you need more information, you can visit an occupational therapist or physiotherapist for an individualised exercise program and specific health advice.

Try a few repetitions of each exercise 2-3 times daily.



## Making a hook fist

Start with fingers and knuckles straight, then bend the middle tip of your finger. Think of the shape you make when carrying a plastic bag.



## Making a full fist

Start with your fingers straight. Make a tight fist, then return to the start position.



## Wrist extension and flexion

Start with your forearm and wrist hanging over the edge of a table. Lift your hand whilst keeping your fingers relaxed. Hold for a few seconds then return to the start position.



## Finger abduction and adduction

With your hand flat on a table, spread your fingers apart as far as comfortable. Then bring them back together as close as possible.



## Thumb abduction and adduction

Move your thumb away from your hand. Then bring it back as close to your hand as possible.



## Thumb opposition

Touch the tip of your thumb to the tip of each finger. Make an "O" shape between your thumb and each finger in turn.

**These exercises may not be suitable for you. Consult a health professional before beginning each exercise if you are unsure.**

Seek medical assistance if you feel any new or increasing pain, or if you feel dizzy, clammy, or short of breath.

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## Contact us

**Website:** [liveup.org.au](http://liveup.org.au)

**Email:** [communities@liveup.org.au](mailto:communities@liveup.org.au)

**Phone:** 1800 951 971

**Facebook:** [facebook.com/LiveUpAus](https://facebook.com/LiveUpAus)

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