

ABILITY -- not disability

Rheumatoid Arthritis

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Grocery shopping, washing clothes, and making beds are necessary chores for the homemaker with rheumatoid arthritis. Unless the homemaker is badly crippled, many persons, including family, may not realize these tasks are so difficult. Besides taking a great deal of energy that the rheumatoid arthritic does not have, these chores often mean a strain on hand and arm muscles and joints. There are ways to make homemaking easier and, hopefully, extend the usable life of your hands.

Grocery Shopping

When you shop, try to bring a family member or friend to help you. At the checkout counter, lifting cans from your basket puts a terrific strain on rheumatoid arthritic hands. Be certain someone is at home to bring heavy bags into the house. Most large supermarkets today have carry out service to your car. Shop every two weeks, and buy groceries in large quantities. Then you don't have to go as often. Know your store and make out your shopping list according to its layout, so you do not have to retrace your steps.

Purchase milk in small cartons. They are easier to lift and pour. Always use both hands and distribute the weight evenly between hands when carrying or pouring from any heavy container.

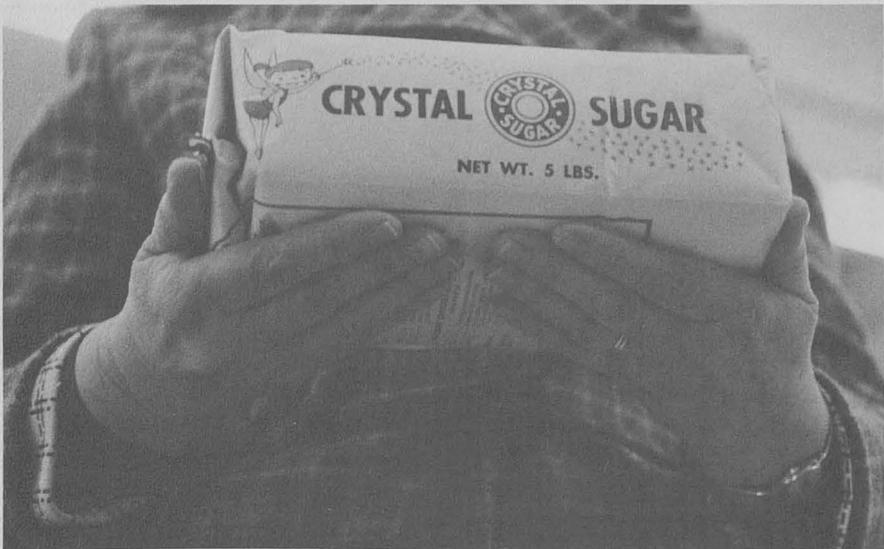




Flip-top boxes can be opened easily by laying the box down and pushing the lid open with the whole hand and arm. Never pry with the fingers because it can stretch ligaments. Pull strips or perforated indentations that must be pushed with the thumb should also be avoided. In these cases, it is better to lay the box down and use a linoleum knife to slit the top open.

Jar tops are easier to open if they are smaller. If it is practical, buy small sizes.

Sugar and flour sacks should be lifted from underneath with both hands. Always let the largest muscles and joints do the work, not the fingers. Extremely heavy bundles should not be lifted at all. Sometimes you must ask for help.



Laundry Rooms

Even if you don't have an efficient new laundry room, you can make changes to help your old laundry room work more efficiently.

Permanent press clothes avoid the need for most ironing which is very difficult for the rheumatoid arthritic homemaker. Good permanent press clothes stay wrinkle-free for years. Cheaper garments often prove to be a bad buy. Remove permanent press clothes from the dryer as soon as they are dry. Allowing them to rest in the bottom of the dryer causes wrinkles.

Hangers and a few hooks should be handy nearby to hang permanent press clothes immediately to avoid wrinkles.

Spray starch used on the collars and cuffs of permanent press shirts as soon as they come from the dryer helps them look even better.

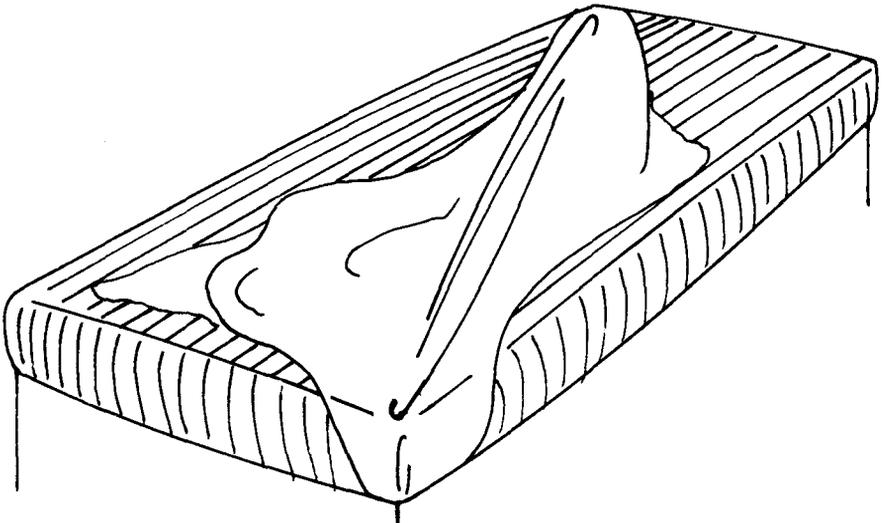
Counter for folding, no matter how makeshift, allows you to fold clothes as soon as they are out of the dryer.

Lightweight baskets make carrying clothes up and down stairs easier. It is best if someone else in the family does this for you.

Making Beds

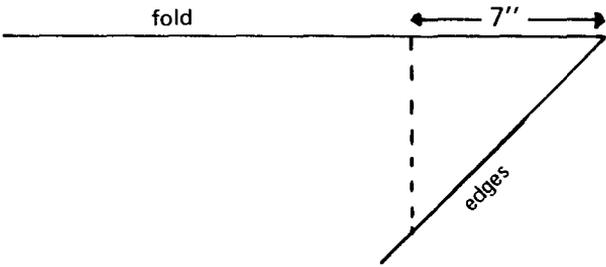
This is one of the most difficult tasks for a rheumatoid arthritic because it involves stretching, pulling, and lifting. If possible, someone else should do it, however, there are ways to make it easier.

Fitted sheets should be put on diagonally by attaching one corner and then the corner opposite. This means more steps around the bed, but it takes less pulling to get the sheet on. The last corner is easier to do if the mattress is propped up on the knee.

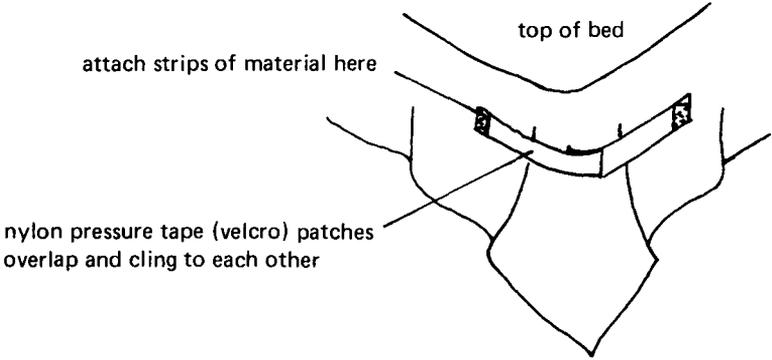


Make half of the bed at a time. Finish one whole side before starting on the other side. This saves steps and energy.

Homemade fitted sheets that are easier to use can be made in two ways. The top can be mitered by bringing the two edges together and sewing a straight seam seven inches from the corner to form a right triangle. The top then fits on like a fitted sheet. At each of the bottom corners, sew a piece of elastic diagonally across the corner, attaching it at each edge about 15" from the corner. The sheet lies flat and the elastic is slipped underneath the mattress without lifting.



Nylon pressure tape (velcro) that sticks to itself may be sewn on two strips of material attached to the sheet. These wrap around the corner of the bed and hold the sheet in place. The sheet may hang down or be tucked in lightly.



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Brushing Teeth

Brushing teeth is often difficult for a person with rheumatoid arthritis. He or she cannot grasp a small toothbrush firmly enough, and some mornings it hurts to move the brush around the mouth. An electric toothbrush with a large handle is easy to hold, and the brush moves automatically.

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