



*"There's always a way,  
even if it doesn't often  
look like it!" Susana*



More than 20 million people  
worldwide are currently living  
with rheumatoid arthritis

*"Just because you have  
rheumatoid arthritis, you  
shouldn't feel different when you  
walk down the street." Antonio*



**Rheumatoid Arthritis:**  
Experiences, Ideas, and Support



“The best treatment is one that doesn't make you feel like a patient, that means you can have a normal life, that doesn't change when you go on holiday and that gives you an acceptable quality of life – just because you have rheumatoid arthritis you shouldn't feel different when you walk down the street.”  
Antonio, Spain

## Introduction

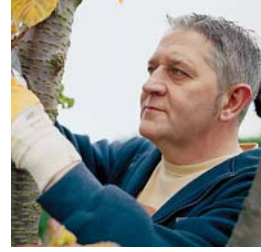
The 'B Me' initiative aims to raise awareness of the impact of rheumatoid arthritis on everyday life. 'B Me' would like to thank the people with rheumatoid arthritis, caregivers and healthcare professionals who have made this booklet possible by sharing their experiences and who have given advice in order to help others with rheumatoid arthritis live as independently as possible.

Experience of rheumatoid arthritis is individual and will vary over the course of time. This booklet is designed to offer practical advice on coping with rheumatoid arthritis that is easy to incorporate into daily life. Although some strategies will appeal more than others depending on one's unique experience, we hope that this collection of ideas will be helpful and inspiring.

Rheumatoid arthritis can affect anyone at any time but usually occurs between the ages of 30 and 50 and affects three times as many women as men

It is important to seek early treatment as up to **70% of people with rheumatoid arthritis have signs of permanent joint damage** within the first two years of the start of their disease

“My message to fellow rheumatoid arthritis sufferers is not to give up hope, it’s taken me eight years to get here and I am now pain free most of the time. Once I found the right treatment, the pains in the balls of my feet went away, my fingers stopped being swollen, my wrists went down, I was able to lift my arms above my head and I could carry weights without suffering for the next three days. Do not give up.” Steve, UK



## Foreword

A diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis often comes as a shock and can cause extreme concern about the future and what to expect both for the person concerned and for those around them.

Adapting to life with rheumatoid arthritis is not easy. With the right treatment and lifestyle changes, however, it is possible to take control of the condition to help reduce pain and inflammation and ultimately to stop the progression of the disease.

Early diagnosis and prompt access to medical care are very important in order to minimise the potential for irreversible damage to the joints. Treatment for rheumatoid arthritis has progressed rapidly over the last few years and there are now many therapies available that work in different ways to control symptoms and prevent the permanent damage to joints which can result in disability.

Many innovative biologic therapies that specifically target the cells responsible for the inflammation associated with rheumatoid arthritis are available for those people who do not respond to conventional treatment.

People vary in their response to different treatment options. With the variety of therapies that exist today, there is no reason why most people with rheumatoid arthritis should have to put up with ongoing symptoms. Persistent symptoms indicate that the disease is not under control and that joint damage continues to occur. It is important that people seek a change in therapy if their current treatment option is not working.

In making lifestyle changes, it is important to focus on what can be done by following advice to make daily life easier. This booklet briefly summarises some of the most common ideas and techniques from people living with rheumatoid arthritis around the world, with particular focus on everyday activities in and around the home. By sharing the following tips and advice, we hope to encourage people with rheumatoid arthritis to continue living as independently as possible.

**Dr Andrew Östör,**

Consultant Rheumatologist & Associate Lecturer,  
Director, Rheumatology Clinical Research Unit  
University of Cambridge, UK

# Making **objects** more user friendly

There are a few basic principles that form the basis of altering objects to make them more user-friendly:

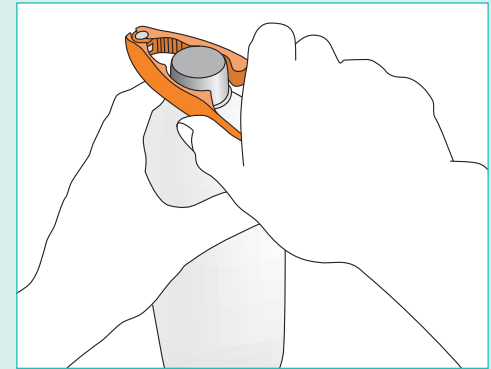
- Fix and secure – wherever possible, make sure that you have both hands free to handle objects
- Enlarge objects to improve grip
- Make things lighter to reduce pain and strength needed to move or carry heavy items
- Lengthen handles to assist in reaching items that are out of grasp
- Avoid small buttons that require using the finger tip to press or turn

*“The little things in life are the hardest.”  
Georges, Brazil*

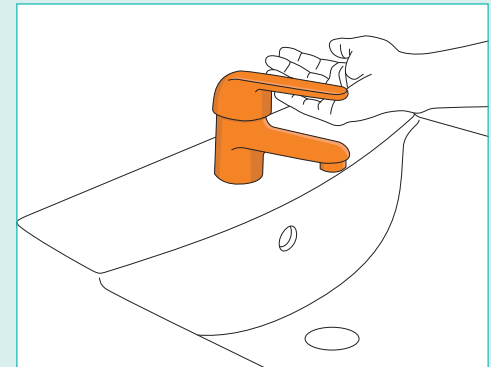
## The kitchen

### ↓ Tips and advice

- Utensils are often difficult to hold – attaching lengths of foam rubber piping over small handles makes them easier to grip, for example knives and forks. Children’s cutlery provides a good solution as it is often bigger, lighter and easier to hold ↓



- Use a nutcracker to open jars and bottles, to grip the lip or top and give extra leverage ↑
- Invest in long lever taps that are easier to turn on and off using the palm of the hand or the forearm ↓



*“I want my patients to be able to carry on a normal life despite the arthritis, a life without limitations in terms of movement and most importantly a life without pain.”*

*Dr Elena Casilli, Italy*

- Use electronic appliances where possible – food processors for chopping food are particularly useful. Be sure to spend time researching the most user-friendly appliance for you

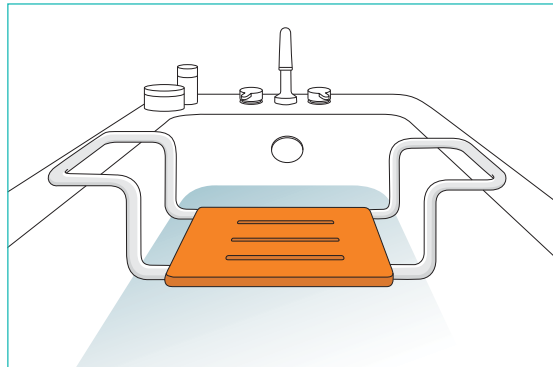
- It is also often more comfortable to sit down when preparing food. Using plastic stools or chairs of different heights helps reduce bending and stretching and many are lightweight and easier to use around the house

- Use a chop stick or similar implement to hook and grab small laundry items out of the washing machine

## The bathroom

### ↓ Tips and advice

- Where possible, install wide, non-slip handles or support rails to assist with getting in and out of the bath and on and off the toilet
- A bath seat suspended across the bath can also aid getting in and out. A shower seat is useful if you find it difficult to stand for long periods of time ↓



- A long handle can also be attached to hair brushes or combs to make personal grooming easier ↑
- Use a wide, non-slip, long handled brush to wash yourself
- Invest in a towelling bath robe as this is sometimes easier to use than a towel for drying
- Electric toothbrushes make cleaning teeth much easier as they require very little pressure and the base is often quite wide with a non-slip handle

# Getting **dressed**

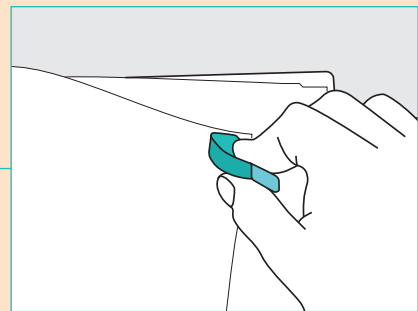
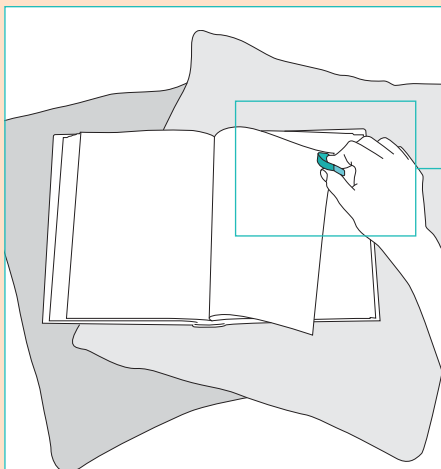
## ↓ Tips and advice

- Select clothing carefully – purchasing clothes through mail order or online means you can take time to try things on at your own pace
- Clothes that are easier to wear include: elastic waistbands, large buttons, Velcro fixings/‘buttons’
- Look out for fabrics that are soft and do not need ironing
- For buttoned shirts, pull the shirt on over your head without having to fasten or unfasten the buttons
- Attach a ring or a length of fabric to the end of zips to aid in doing-up and un-doing clothing

# In and around **the home**

## ↓ Tips and advice

- Ensure that chairs have arm rests to assist with standing up and sitting down
- Use cushions to give you better support – this applies to anywhere where you will need to be seated
- When reading, prop the book up on cushions on your lap and use an eraser to turn the pages ↓
- Place furniture strategically to help you move around the house
- Invest in touch lamps that mean you don’t have to fiddle with small switches for turning lights on and off
- If you are thinking of buying a new bed, pay attention to the height – it is often easier to get in and out of a bed that is higher off the floor





“It’s been great making friends with other people who have the same or a similar condition so we can all exchange experiences, compare the influence of the weather changes on us and moan about our pains – all without a guilty conscience!” Susana, Spain

## Out and about

Many people find that they feel comfortable in their own home but going out means that they will not have access to the tools and aids on hand in the home.

### ↓ Tips and advice

- Use a special key ring with an adaptable handle to help turn keys in locks →
- Use a magnet for picking up coins
- Adapt crutches by wrapping a bandage around the handle to make it more comfortable to grip



## Emotional wellbeing

### ↓ Tips and advice

It is important to look after your mind as well as your body.

- Laughter is a great tonic – don’t let rheumatoid arthritis stop you from doing the things you enjoy
- Focus on what you can do, not what you can’t
- Try to get enough sleep and give yourself permission to rest when you need to
- Don’t think of yourself as ill. People with rheumatoid arthritis are still fit and active individuals
- Consider joining a social or networking group where you can talk to others with rheumatoid arthritis to share experiences and advice

**Find additional support via an occupational therapist who can provide a personal assessment of ways in which to maintain independence and minimise the impact of rheumatoid arthritis.**

For more information about 'B Me', please visit  
[www.bmeinitiative.com](http://www.bmeinitiative.com)

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