

MAKING IT A LITTLE EASIER

Tips on Living with Rheumatoid Arthritis thru different stages

By: Ray Urbaniak

My Mother has been living with Rheumatoid Arthritis for the past 27 years. I could classify her different stages as Mobile, Semi Mobile, & Limited Mobility. Hopefully, with the new drugs that are coming out, new patients can avoid the later stages of Arthritis. Those who are presently in one of these three (3) stages may find a tip or two which makes life a little easier.

Mobile

In the early stages of Rheumatoid Arthritis my Mother only required simple tools to get around more easily.

A car key turning assist such as shown on the following web page was a necessity (I list some web pages only as an example of what is available. You should check other suppliers for the best product and the best price.)

<http://www.arthritissupplies.com/site/371928/product/ASN317>



She also required an assist to turn lamp switches such as that shown along with other assists on the following web page.

<http://www.arthritissupplies.com/site/371928/page/461277>

However, an old fashioned wooden spring style cloths pin works just as well.

Can & bottle opening assists were also required, and there are many of these to choose from. A pair of pliers can also be used.

The other area where she had a considerable number of problems was with her feet. Special shoes are available, but I have found that if you can stumble across a pair of shoes which have a thick cushioned bottom worn

with thick socks, and the shoes are made out of a very flexible material they may actually be better than the special shoes that are sold in specialty shoe stores. We found such a pair of sneakers a number of years ago that greatly improved her mobility. Keep an eye out for something like this since they come in and out of fashion.

Assist bars in the bathroom & railings in her residences also made things easier & safer. Light weight pots, pans, dishes(such as Corning's Corelle) & glasses were also needed during this phase.

Semi Mobile

Despite the benefits of drugs she eventually required additional assists. It became impossible for her to tie the laces on her shoes. The life of these shoes was extended by using a velcro add on product.

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B000LT2QVQ/iansshoelace-20>



Her feet also had sensitive spots. Foam shoe liners were added to her shoes with holes cut in the foam to reduce pressure on the sensitive spots. These holes had to be covered with tape to help spread the pressure created by the edge of the cut hole.

During this stage she started using a walker. There are many walkers available. For indoor use & limited out door use a conventions walker is fine. The addition of "little skis" on the back help the walker maneuver over

small bumps & grooves. <http://www.amazon.com/Drive-Medical-Walker-Glide-Skis/dp/B000SOLBWY>

Some people use tennis balls , but they don't slide as well & don't look very good.



I put up a number of bars & railing to assist her in the bathroom and shower during this phase. When she moved into an independent living facility which had a tub in the bathroom that had a cut out section to allow her to get into the tub. I had to add a tub assist bar. Example below (they come in steel & plastic)

<http://www.independentliving.com/prodinfo.asp?number=MED228W>



This wasn't enough support though. A bar was added to the opposite wall & I cut a piece of PVC pipe running between the 2 which I attached with Stainless steel adjustable screw clamps. This made a secure bar in front of her that she could hang onto while showering. I also taped a piece of plastic to the faucet pull up rod so that she could grab it. A plastic door handle lever was added to the shower pull knob so that she could pull & turn it (I had to cut off a small piece of the existing shower handle with a hack saw so that the handle would fit.).



We also put two of these plastic handles on inside & outside of the front door.

http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00023DIFE/ref=oh_o01_s00_i00_details

For walking outside or for longer distances a walker with large wheels was purchased. It also had a seat so she could rest when needed.

<http://www.target.com/p/Hugo-Rolling-Walker-Elite-Adjustable-Rollator-with-Seat-Backrest-and-Saddle-Bag-Blue/-/A-10522992>



Even with this style of walker & the big wheels it should be noted that any threshold or slight bump or groove should be crossed at a slight angle so that both wheels don't hit the bump at the same time. Crossing a groove in the sidewalk at an angle makes the obstacle much smoother and avoids hang ups.

During this phase regular silverware became heavy & difficult to hang on to. The special utensils with large handles were supposed to help, but she found them too heavy. A piece of foam tubing over the handles helped. A slightly

fancier version can be found at

<http://www.arthritissupplies.com/site/371928/product/AAM137>



Solid Plastic silverware with large hollow handles & sharp prongs on the fork would work best, but I have not seen them available as yet.

Toward the end of this phase a transport chair was purchased for longer excursions: travel by car & plane, visits to the mall, etc. A transport chair is easier to handle, easier to collapse than a wheel chair & has less of the stigma of a wheel chair.

http://www.phc-online.com/Travel_Wheelchair_p/transport_sl18.htm



Limited Mobility

My Mother now requires assists for almost everything. A bar that fits on the side of the bed is needed for her to get up.

<http://www.vitalitymedical.com/standers-bed-cane-assist.html>



We also used a triangular wooden yoga prop(a calf stretcher) to prop her up in bed (allows her to get up, since she can't get up if lying flat.), vs a hospital bed.

A pull switch floor lamp, with an added large knob, next to her bed lets her turn on a light. Small flat LED lights that respond to touch are also near by in case of a power failure or a burned out bulb.

During the day she sits in an electric lift chair recliner with a simple push button control to help lift herself up from the chair & stand up.

<http://www.all-lift-chairs.com/Pride-Casual-Line-Lift-Chair---Model--C-15-Cameo.htm>



Next to her chair I added a light dimmer remote touch sensitive switch so she can turn the light on & adjust the light intensity with the touch of a finger.

http://www.lowes.com/pd_240206-207-6043BCL_0_?productId=3128299&Ntt=touch+remote+light+switch&pl=1¤tURL=%2Fpl_0_s%3FNtt%3Dtouch%2Bremote%2Blight%2Bswitch&facetInfo=



We also purchased a Safety Wheel Chair which automatically locks unless she is seated. This prevents the chair from scooting out from under her. This is necessary since she is unable to engage the manual locks with her arthritic hands. Even if she was able to work the manual locks I wanted to avoid the possibility that she would forget to lock them once & fall. I did add a curved piece of PVC tubing to one of the locking handles so that she could engage the lock on one wheel enough to prevent the chair from rolling backwards while she is eating at the table.

<http://www.saferwheelchairs.com/>

<http://www.saferwheelchairs.com/pdf/MSR-Price-Structure.pdf>



One of the plastic handles previously used on her former front door was modified to fit her bathroom sink faucet so that it was easier to turn on & off.

We had a portal toilet left over from when she had had foot surgery. This was modified to make a frame with arm rests that fit over her toilet. Something similar to this....



Velcro fleece wraps sold to protect you from seat belt pressure were put over the arm rests to prevent the arm rests from scratching her arms. Sold at places like Walmart in the automotive section...

<http://www.walmart.com/ip/Custom-Accessories-Seat-Belt-Shoulder-Pad-Black/16795105>

You can find fat pens with easy grip silicone if you look carefully in most stores. Or you slip a piece of foam tubing over regular pens.

It is also essential to have a cordless phone with large numbers & a speaker phone button so she doesn't have to hold the phone too long.

As I mentioned in the beginning... "Hopefully with the new drugs that are coming out, new patients can avoid the later stages of Arthritis."

Yet for those who are in the later stages, props & assists can definitely make life less difficult.