

## Keep Your HCE Hands Healthy January 2025 On Your Own Lesson

Whether you are doing your favorite hobby, reading a book, cooking or doing a craft project our hands are involved. Keeping them healthy and flexible through your life may affect the enjoyment of life and doing your favorite activities. Jessica Migala from AARP offers the following hand exercises to limber up arthritic hands.

Osteoarthritis is a condition caused by the natural wearing away of the cartilage that covers the bone. In healthy joints, the cartilage coverings at the ends of the bones match up and glide smoothly against one another. But as arthritis wears the cartilage away, the movement becomes less smooth, often leading to stiffness, loss of motion and pain, especially in the tip joint of the finger. It's estimated that 40% of us will develop osteoarthritis according to research in *Arthritis & Rheumatology*. We can't build back cartilage but we can preserve motion by keeping the soft tissue in the joints as flexible as possible. Start doing hand exercises every day to maintain hand function. Exercise can improve grip strength, reduce pain and tired hands. But be careful, some exercises, like squeezing a stress ball can actually irritate joints by causing rough cartilage to rub together, increasing pain and swelling.

The following moves should not hurt. When doing them, let pain be your guide: If it hurts, stop. It's also a good idea to get checked out by your doctor first to rule out other conditions, such as carpal tunnel syndrome. Warm up in the morning simply by going about your regular routine: Make breakfast, get dressed, feed the dog. Then, with your doctor's OK, aim to go through these exercises every day. Plan to do five repeats on each hand. You can build these into routine activities, such as when you're talking on the phone or watching TV.

### Exercise 1: Shoulder Stretch



Do your shoulders feel tense? This stiffness can lead to all sorts of problems in your arms.

**Step 1:** Stretch your arms up. Next, bend your right elbow to reach your right hand behind your head toward your shoulder blades.

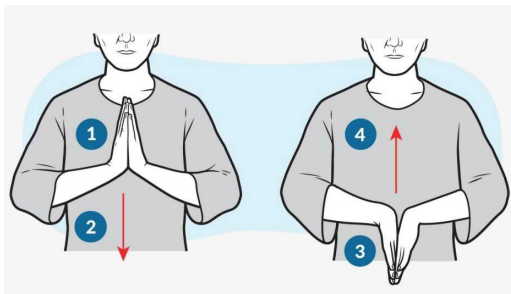
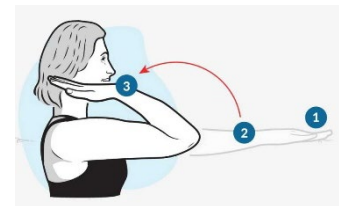
**Step 2:** With your left hand, grab your right elbow and then pull it gently toward the center of your back. Switch arms and repeat.

**Exercise 2: Elbow flexion and extension** This exercise can help treat conditions such as tennis or golfer's elbow.

**Step 1:** Stretch one arm out in front of you, palm down.

**Step 2:** Now turn your palm up and bend at the elbow so that your palm moves toward your shoulder.

**Step 3:** Hold for a beat, then straighten your arm back out and turn your palm back to the starting position.



**Exercise 3: Prayer and reverse prayer** This stretch can help combat carpal tunnel syndrome.

**Step 1:** Bring palms together in prayer position, elbows out, at chest height.

**Step 2:** Lower hands to waist level while pressing palms together. Hold for a beat.

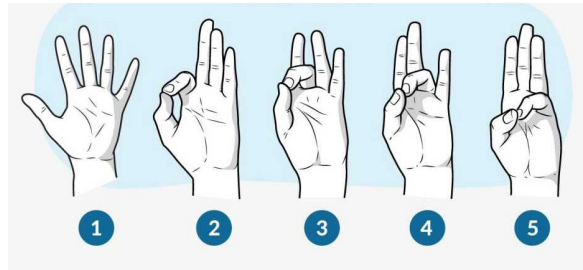
**Step 3:** Turn hands so backs of hands are together, palms out, fingers pointing down toward toes.

**Step 4:** Raise hands back to the starting position.

**Exercise 4: Finger spread** Osteoarthritis can make it hard to open and close your hands, but this stretch can help maintain your flexibility.

**Step 1:** Hold one hand up in front of you, palm facing you. Spread fingers as far apart as you can.

**Step 2:** Close your hand to make a fist and hold for a few seconds. Repeat with the opposite hand.



**Exercise 5: Finger touch** If you see joint deformity in your fingers, especially your pinkie, this is an important exercise to try.

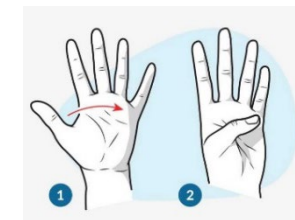
**Step 1:** Hold your hand in front of your face, palm facing you, fingers straight.

**Steps 2–5:** One at a time, touch each finger (index, middle, ring, pinkie) to your thumb to form a series of OK signs.

**Exercise 6: Thumb stretch** Text a lot with your thumbs? If so, this is a great exercise.

**Step 1:** Hold your hand in front of your face, palm facing you.

**Step 2:** Keeping your four fingers still, move your thumb across your palm and try to touch the base of your pinkie finger.



**Exercise 7: Knuckle bend** This improves direct flexion and range of motion.

**Step 1:** Hold your hand in front of your face, palm facing you, with fingertips pointing up toward the sky. Keep your fingers straight and close together.

## 7 More Ideas to Keep Your Hands Healthy and Helpful

1. Buy ergonomic scissors: They require less hand strength than regular scissors.
2. Use kitchen shears instead of a knife when cooking — shears are easier for cutting food such as chicken.
3. Avoid hard-to-open pill containers by putting your daily meds in pill boxes.
4. Switch from pull-top canned groceries to bagged groceries. Trade your hand-held can opener for an electric can opener.
5. Make a zipper pull. Adding a key ring or a loop of fabric to a zipper makes it easier to grip and reduces strain on thumb and index finger.
6. Replace large heavy bottles of soaps, creams and gels with smaller squeeze bottles or fill a pump style dispenser. They are easier to handle. Tubes or pumps can be pressed with the heel of the hand.
7. Use a pen with a non-slip grip that is easier to hold to reduce strain on finger joints.