



Top-tips to help you participate in creative hobbies when living with a long-term condition

Painting, model-making and crochet are just a few of the many types of creative hobbies that people like to engage in on a day-to-day basis. They can be enjoyable, relaxing and offer a sense of purpose and achievement which can be invaluable for those living with an energy limiting long-term condition. Unfortunately, some of the persistent symptoms that people experience such as chronic pain, inflamed joints and fatigue can make it difficult to meaningfully engage in these activities which can impact on your psychological health. Engaging in hobbies/interests is important to support our recovery, identity and wellbeing.

We have put together some practical strategies that draw on the four principles of energy management – planning, prioritising, permission and pacing, which you may be able to apply in your handicraft activity to help you live better despite the symptoms that you are experiencing.



Preparing for Activity

- Before participating in your creative hobby, consider strategies that may address any joint inflammation or pain you are experiencing. If you take pain-relief, consider the timing of when you utilise this. If taken too early or too late, you may encounter increased pain mid-activity which could hamper your participation and enjoyment.
- Consider applying hot or cold compresses to swollen joints before engaging in your hobby. This may help loosen your joints and reduce inflammation and swelling.
- Light hand exercises can be helpful to 'warm' your wrists, fingers and thumb for movement. Visit the Versus Arthritis website for useful information on safe exercises that you can try before you engage in your hobby [Exercises for the fingers, hands and wrists | Versus Arthritis](#).
- If you struggle with fatigue or feel the act of engaging in a creative hobby overwhelming, consider setting small and achievable goals that you can work towards i.e. ten minutes of activity each day. Whilst this may feel difficult to start with, developing a routine can help provide structure and purpose to our lives which can make us feel happier and have a greater sense of wellbeing.
- Consider what time of the day you participate in your creative hobby. If your hobby is highly stimulating, you may wish to plan to do this earlier in the day and not before you go to bed. Likewise, if your creative hobby is calming you may want to build this into your 'wind-down' routine to prepare your body for sleep.

Posture

- Maintaining a stable and neutral posture is important as excessive bending or reaching can put additional strain on your joints and muscles which may cause discomfort or pain.
- Consider gentle stretches or movement to relieve tension and strain.
- Consider the chair/settee you sit in when participating in your creative hobby. Is the seat too soft or too hard? A chair/settee which is unsupportive can affect your posture and may place excessive pressure on your back, hips and knees.
- Make sure that your arms, wrists and hands are supported. Access to armrests or a supporting surface can help stabilise, control movement and reduce the risk of excessive strain.
- If your hobby involves intricate detail, consider using a magnifying glass to reduce bending forward and eye strain.
- Try to keep your elbows, wrists and fingers/thumb in a 'neutral' position i.e. not overly bent (flexed) or straightened (extended).

Grip and Fine Movement

- If your symptoms make it difficult to hold tools i.e. paintbrushes, crochet hooks and pens/pencils, utilise tools with enlarged grips. These can be bought from online/specialist shops but can easily be made at home using polymer clays (Fimo) or from pipe lagging.
- For those who enjoy knitting, sewing and crochet, consider the thickness of the wool that you use and the level of tension you apply.



Environment

- Make sure that your workspace is adequately lit to avoid eye strain and so that you can see what you're doing. If you are sensitive to light, consider wearing tinted glasses or use a lamp with a blue-light filter which can reduce light intensity.
- Temperature can have a big impact on our pain and comfort levels. This is unique to everybody, therefore consider if you might benefit from a warmer or cooler room to manage this.
- Consider distractions in your environment. Multi-tasking can drain our energy levels quickly therefore trying to watch TV or use your phone at the same time as engaging in your handicraft could lead to increased fatigue. If you do like to have something on in the background, perhaps consider relaxing music or the radio.
- Try to avoid participating in your handicraft in bed. As well as the impact this could have on your posture, we advise the bed is reserved for sleep only which is discussed in more detail in our Top Tips for Sleeping Well.

(Images courtesy of Vecteezy.com)