

COOKING IN COMFORT

Preparing healthy meals doesn't have to sap your energy and aggravate your symptoms

You probably know that a well-balanced diet can help alleviate arthritis symptoms. While there is no recommended "arthritis diet," doctors say it helps to consume foods and beverages with quality protein (fish and skim milk, for example), as well as fresh fruits, vegetables, and grains. The trouble is, making healthy meals usually requires a good deal of effort. Eating nutritionally rich, home-cooked meals may help

diminish your arthritis, but preparing the food can aggravate your symptoms and zap your energy, making you feel like you're spinning your wheels.

What can be done to keep the effects of healthy eating and strenuous food preparation from canceling each other out? *The Essential Arthritis Cookbook* (The Arthritis Center and the Department of Nutrition Sciences, University of Alabama at Birmingham, Appletree Press, 1995, 800-322-5679) suggests several strategies.

CONSERVE ENERGY. "Think of food-energy as a deposit into a daily savings account," recommends the book. "To manage arthritis, you will want to budget this energy wisely." One way to save energy is to sit in a straight-backed chair with a firm seat. Let your arms rest on the table top or counter, and keep both feet on the floor.

STAND STRAIGHT. If you have to stand up—for instance, to stir food on the stove or wash a pot—avoid

bending over, which can cause tension in your neck, shoulders, spine, back, and hips. Your countertop work surface should be about 2 inches below your elbows when your shoulders are relaxed.

MINIMIZE LIFTING. If possible, have other people do things like bring in groceries and put heavy items up on shelves.

LEAVE UTENSILS OUT. If there is room on your counter, leave out items like the blender and heavy bowls so you don't have to repeatedly store and unstore them. If you do put things away, store them within easy reach.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TECHNOLOGY. Items like a microwave oven, a food processor, a mixer, and an electric can opener can greatly simplify the cooking process.

KEEP YOUR HANDS IN THE SHAPE OF A C. Clenched fists create tension in the joints. Keep each hand opened and bend your fingers to make the letter C, with the fingertips 2 to 3 inches from your palm and your thumb extended. If possible, open your hands even further and use your palms to do things like hold jars.

GET ARTHRITIS-FRIENDLY COOKING TOOLS. Stock up on large-handled, lightweight pots, pans, dishes, and utensils that won't tax your hands and arms when you maneuver them. You can also make the handles of existing tools bigger by sliding foam-rubber tubing over them.

TAKE FREQUENT BREAKS. Have casual, buffet-style meals. Cooking for others when you've got arthritis is a gift. Instead of making more work for yourself by setting the table and doing the dishes, let family members serve themselves using paper plates. —*Catherine Dee*

EASY CHICKEN

Ingredients

- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 pound boneless and skinless chicken breasts
- 1 pound small new potatoes, scrubbed
- 1 10-ounce package of frozen sugar snap peas
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/2 teaspoon chicken-flavored bouillon
- 2 Tablespoons dried minced onion
- 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon lemon pepper seasoning

1. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat; add chicken, and cook until lightly brown, turning as needed.
2. Place vegetables around chicken. Add all other ingredients.
3. Cover and bring to a boil over medium heat; reduce heat and simmer 25 minutes or until potatoes and chicken are tender.

Recipe from the *Essential Arthritis Cookbook*

