

# Don't let hand pain spoil your spring fun!

The temps are getting warmer, the days are getting longer—and the great outdoors beckons! Whatever your favorite springtime activities, you can minimize the strain on arthritic hands (and maximize the fun!) with these tips from occupational and certified hand therapist Roxanne Perry of Armonk Physical Therapy & Sports Training in Armonk, NY. BY JOANA MANGUNE

## IF YOUR PLANS INCLUDE...

### GARDENING



#### ► Stretch first.

Before heading out, loosen your joints with a steamy shower and gentle stretches. “You want

to have a good range of motion before you do any work,” says Perry. An easy hand stretch: Flex your fingers backward and then forward into a loose fist. Or use one hand to gently pull back the fingers on the other one.

► **Use your shoulders.** Avoid finger strain by relying more on your shoulders when pruning trees or pulling weeds. “Bigger joints can apply bigger forces, which takes the stress off finger joints,” says Perry.

► **Choose plastic over metal.** Use tools made of lighter materials that are easy to carry and hold (e.g., a plastic rake with a large-grip handle).

► **Apply foam.** To get a better grasp, put foam grips on tool handles and avoid holding tightly, which can strain fingers and aggravate joints. (See [gripworks.com](http://gripworks.com) for options.)

### HOSTING A BBQ



#### ► Prep the day before.

Chop veggies and cook potatoes or pasta ahead of time so you're not doing

it all in one shot. Or buy precut veggies and store-bought salads—it'll give you more energy to enjoy the time with your guests!

► **Use two hands.** “Never lift anything heavy like a pot without using both hands,” Perry says. “This gives you more strength and lessens the force you put on your wrists.”

#### ► Sip from a handled cup.

“Put your fingers through the handle so it latches onto your hand; then there's no fear of dropping it,” explains Perry.

► **Ask for help!** “Just because there's something that you *used* to do doesn't mean you have to force yourself to do it and go through pain,” says Perry. Ask guests to bring a dish. For help in the kitchen, try: “My arthritis is acting up—do you mind washing dishes while I dry?”

### GOING ON A PICNIC



#### ► Get a cooler with wheels.

“Rolling a cooler will take the weight off your hands, plus you can make

smaller motions, so it's better for your wrists,” says Perry. Also, push the cooler forward—don't pull it.

► **Carry a basket with open hands.** Rest the picnic basket on both of your palms or forearms and keep hands open rather than gripping with your fingers.

► **Spread out on a bench or table.** “Make sure to set up your picnic at waist level,” Perry notes. “You want to avoid reaching and bending—this will decrease the amount of force you put on your hands and conserve energy.”

► **Use paper or plastic dishware.** Remember, lighter is better! Get a disposable tablecloth, too: When it's time to clean up, you can just gather the corners into a bundle and toss everything into the trash! 🗑️