

HINTS ON CONSERVING ENERGY

GRACE R. YOUNG, MA, OTR, FRESNO, CALIFORNIA

As a polio survivor, I have had to modify many areas of my life over the years. I assure you, however, that this modifying is not as oppressive as it may sound. By conserving energy in less important areas, I can still do the activities that I enjoy — that's what energy conservation is all about. Here are a few ideas I hope you will find helpful.

Rest before you become aware of fatigue, a difficult task because most of us were taught to ignore pain and fatigue. Before starting an activity, decide how long you will work and when you will take rest breaks. For stressful projects, set a timer and break the activity into segments of half-hour work and fifteen minutes rest. Lie down during your rest break — listen to music or watch television, meditate, visualize or read, but get off your feet.

Don't become over-ambitious on days when you feel good, or you may then be sidelined for several days. Alternate light and heavy chores throughout the week. Don't do anything heavy if you're planning an evening activity.

Sit whenever possible — for showering, dressing, grooming, working with hobbies, preparing meals, etc. Sitting takes 25% less energy than standing. When you sit, make sure that your work heights are about an inch below elbow level. A drafting chair on casters with a pneumatic seat lift works well, but back it into a corner before hoisting yourself onto the raised seat or the chair may roll out from under you. Other ways to obtain a lower work surface: use a beanbag lapboard, a wooden cutting board on your lap, or an adjustable-height, hospital bedside table, which you may find in a thrift store.

Organize your home so that items are easy to reach and you don't have to duplicate motions. In the kitchen, store frequently used items at a height between your hips and your lips. Use vinyl-coated wire racks to store dishes in stacks of their own kind; store pots and skillets individually on wire racks so that you don't have to lift top items to get to one on the bottom. Use stacking storage bins on wheels and wire shelf units that hook over pantry doors. One- and two-level sliding racks, bins, baskets, and shelf trays can make base cabinets for food staples and cleaning supplies.

GRACE R. YOUNG, MA, OTR, is an occupational therapist and a polio survivor who has published and lectured extensively on energy conservation for polio survivors. She recently retired from Kaiser-Permanente in Downey, California and is presently working at San Joaquin Valley Rehabilitation Center in Fresno, California.

Don't put away items you use frequently. After washing pans or skillets, for example, let them dry on top of the stove. Let dishes dry in a rack and then use them in setting the table for the next meal.

Arrange your home to minimize trips. Install floor-to-ceiling pole shelves over the toilet tank in each bathroom for storing towels and washcloths. Store sheets and pillowcases in each bedroom where they are used.

Duplicate supplies used in different areas. For example, store cleanser and sponges under each sink and keep a broom and dustpan in several locations.

Avoid buying deep pile carpets with thick padding. Wheelchair users find plush carpeting difficult to maneuver on, and people with walking problems may have difficulty maintaining their balance on it. Throw away throw rugs that can slip, and remember that ceramic tile floors are slippery when wet.

And, finally, use mechanical help for carrying things. Carrying heavy items changes your center of gravity and stresses your trunk, arm, and leg muscles. A kitchen utility cart on casters, available in most housewares departments, allows you to transport dishes, glasses, silverware, and food from the counter to the table and back again in one trip. Use the cart to carry laundry and cleaning items, and push it along when you straighten the house. A lightweight luggage cart is useful in many situations. Use one to carry purchases, to transport articles between the car, house, or office, and to move articles from room to room. I keep a luggage cart open and ready to use whenever I have to carry heavy or bulky items around the house. (The definition of "heavy," of course, depends upon the strength of the individual.)

You undoubtedly have many other ideas that are appropriate to your particular lifestyle. Look upon energy conservation as just the latest challenge in your life. ↵

WHAT IS OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?

Occupational therapy is a health and rehabilitation profession.

Occupational therapy is skilled treatment that helps individuals achieve independence. Services include:

- ◆ Customized treatment programs aimed at improving abilities to carry out activities of daily living
- ◆ Comprehensive evaluation of home and job environments and recommendations on necessary adaptation
- ◆ Assessments and treatment for work performance skills
- ◆ Recommendations and training in the use of adaptive equipment to replace lost function
- ◆ Instructions to family members and attendants in safe and effective methods of caring for individuals

Extracted from materials of the American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc., 4720 Montgomery Lane, P.O. Box 31220, Bethesda, Maryland 20824-1220, 301/652-AOTA (2682), 301/652-7711 FAX, or 800/377-8555 TDD.