

Arthritis & Shooting



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When you have arthritis, gripping a handgun can be like holding the handle of a jackhammer wrapped in barbed wire. Just assuming your grip or trying to mitigate the gun's recoil can cause arthritis to flare up. But why? The pain originates from the fact that a shooter must exert considerable force to support the weight of the handgun, and to provide the stability needed for accuracy.

Arthritis & Shooting

Such forceful contractions of muscles can increase pressure on the inflamed joints of the fingers and hands. There's also the fact that the range of motion required to grasp a roughly tubular object of a relatively small diameter is actually quite large.

Arthritis & Shooting

The effect is strongly dependent on an individual's personal characteristics such as hand size, finger length and strength, but in general, the smaller the diameter of the object to be grasped, the greater the demand on the joints to generate motion...which leads to greater pain. Here are some tips to help make shooting a handgun more manageable.

1. Increase the diameter of the grip.

Increasing the diameter of the gun's grip will decrease the range of motion your hands need to grasp it firmly. This is one of the more intuitive interventions, and one of the easiest to do. There are many quality aftermarket grips that meet this criteria, too many for me to list here, but knowing how they work should help you select the best option for your handgun.

2. Increase the friction between your hand and the gun.

Another option is wearing shooting gloves. They help grip and recoil management through padding, roughly textured palm areas, shock-absorbing materials and wrist supporting wraps. This means you don't have to use as much force to maintain a firm grip on your pistol.

3. Try a smaller caliber, if you can.

Recoil management can be addressed by selecting a different caliber gun. There is no doubt that every .45 ACP packs more recoil than 9mm & .22 LR, and that should translate to less pain while shooting. Unfortunately not everyone's needs are met by this solution. Do what is best for you!

4. Try a “Lighter” load, if you can.

There are ammunition options that can dampen perceived recoil.

Shooting a lower-grain projectile or avoiding "hot" defensive loads may help.

Using sub-sonic ammunition or low recoil loads can be a viable option as well.

5. Reloading Ammunition

An alternative that many already practice is reloading their own ammunition to improve comfort when shooting. Reloading is clearly a large undertaking with a great depth of knowledge and skill required to perform safely, but like learning a foreign language, it can enhance the enjoyment of an already rewarding experience. This is not for everyone though....

6. Change your recoil springs.

In semi-automatics, through the compression of the recoil spring, the kinetic energy released by the ignited powder in a round is translated to stored or potential energy. That energy is then used to return the slide to the forward position, and to hold the chamber closed during the next ignition. Less recoil felt by the user is the side effect of all that work being performed by that spring. Changing the spring is in-expensive and does make an instant difference! These can run from \$5 to \$25 depending on what you want. I have done this option.... It might work for you.

6. Change your recoil springs. Continued....

There are numerous aftermarket springs available, so finding one to fit your pistol should not be difficult. If you have any doubt or questions, contact a reputable firearms instructor and/or reputable gun store for their professional opinion before spending any money on this option.

7. Port your barrel.

A ported barrel also relies on physics to tame the recoil of a firearm. There is no attempt at capturing and converting the energy in this case, however. The science behind cutting holes in a gun barrel is to provide more opportunities for the pressure to exit and spread its influence over a larger, less confined space.

7. Port your barrel.

Continued...

Of all the modifications covered here, barrel porting is likely one of the more expensive and less effective methods of reducing recoil – and reducing arthritis-related pain – but it is provided here as a measure of completeness.

In my professional shooting opinion, porting will make a very small difference and may not be a wise investment.

Conclusion.....

These are just options to look into doing. Nothing will ever be a perfect fix! One of these options or even a combination of the options may be just enough to make your shooting experience better and tolerable too!

Research the options and make the best informed choice and see what happens!

John Hansen
(623) 694-0377

www.hollowpointccw.com

