

# A Day in the Life



## of an Autoimmune Arthritis Patient

Created by the International Foundation for Autoimmune Arthritis



*Everyone has to eat. That's not always easy for patients living with Autoimmune Arthritis diseases. From swollen areas in the mouth and jaw to the occasional inability to prepare or cut food, eating becomes a big challenge for those living with these diseases.*

## Food and Cooking

Created by the International Foundation for Autoimmune Arthritis



Melinda Winner, author of *Cooking with Arthritis*

### Food Preparation

Autoimmune Arthritis affects so much more than just hands, wrists, elbows, and fingers, but those areas sure do cause a problem, at times, when it comes to cooking and eating.

**So what can you do to get through a flare and still prepare a decent meal?**

**Be creative both with gadgets but also with using your body. For example:**

- **Use your forearms.** The forearms are typically unaffected by these diseases, plus they are strong enough to carry items and sturdy enough to push items through blades, as shown above.
- Forearms are also great for lifting empty stock pots that have cooled off.
- **Use your plant stands.** That's right! Melinda Winner, featured above, suggests to use plant stands with rollers attached to the bottom, then easily transport heavy items from one end of the kitchen to the other.

- Use 2 handled pots and pans, electric jar openers, foil on baking sheets for easy clean up
- Put casserole dishes on baking sheets for putting in and taking out of the oven
- Use a crockpot or slow cooker – prepare meals in the evening and turn the crockpot on in the morning
- Take vegetables out of a pot using a slotted spoon; wait until the pot is cool to pour out the water
- Take advantage of good days and cook extra; portion out leftovers and fridge or freeze for fast and easy reheats
- Use utensils that have built up handles for easier gripping
- Use tongs, ladles, or spaghetti scoops to reach items on top shelves or move them
- Consider investing in lighter weight plates and bowls
- Use plastic cups and/or paper plates
- Try serrated knives, steak knives, and pizza cutters for softer foods and cutting sandwiches

# Supporters & Caregivers



### *Eating*

Autoimmune Arthritis diseases do affect the joints (arthritis) but they also affect connective and soft tissues and sometimes organs (most often the skin and eyes, but inflammation in the esophagus is also reported by many patients).

After the gums, the tongue is the most prominent soft tissue in the mouth. Therefore, because these diseases affect tissues too, it is not uncommon for patients to experience swelling, pain, and sores in the mouth region. **Canker sores** in the mouth also can cause pain and swelling.

In addition, while Autoimmune Arthritis diseases tend to target specific joints per disease (helping to determine diagnosis), because they start at a cellular level, causing inflammation to the areas adjacent to the cellular activity, joints anywhere in the body can be affected. This includes the joints in **the jaw**, making chewing difficult. When the jaw, esophagus, salivary glands, and tongue are all flaring at the same time eating may be limited to soft foods or liquids.

**Patients also struggle, at times, preparing food or using their hands to eat the food.** The inflammation from Autoimmune Arthritis, caused when the cells combat internally, feels much like an injury, sprain, or broken bone. So while the pain may not be visible on the surface (except if swelling occurs) unless a patient wrapped their fingers or wore a brace, onlookers could mistakenly assume the patient is not experiencing pain.

At times when fingers and/or hands are flaring it may be impossible to cut food that is not soft, such as chicken or steak. Either the fingers cannot grab the utensils tightly enough to perform the cut (due to stiffness) or the injury-like pain associated with the movement prevents them from doing so.

This type of locking of the joints occurs quickly and without warning. A patient could be cutting food easily and suddenly unable to with the next slice. More common, the pain from inflammation in the fingers and hands (that mimics the sensation of having a bruised bone or sprain) makes cutting food virtually impossible.

### *Supporters*

Ask yourself this: If your fingers were bruised or sprained, would you be able to comfortably prepare food or cut through meat? If you were injured but with no visible injury, how would you handle the situation? Would you tough through it so no one questions or thinks you are faking your pain? Perhaps patients to the same.

