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# MOTOR NEURONE DISEASE

## FACT SHEET No 4A

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### Practical ideas and advice for people with upper limb weakness (1)

In most of our everyday activities we take for granted the work done by our hands and arms. We also take for granted the “tools” we use cutlery, kitchen utensils, pens, combs, toothbrushes and telephones. When muscle weakness makes everyday tasks difficult, changing to a different type of “tool” or using a different method may make it possible to continue doing some tasks independently.

#### EATING AND DRINKING

##### 1. Arm Support

Neck and shoulder muscles may become weak, making it difficult to raise the arms to eat. Providing support for the forearms, thus bringing the hands to a suitable working height, makes tasks easier.

Ways of doing this include;

- pillows.
- adjustable cantilever tables.
- a box (cut to required height) placed on the table.
- use of a bed tray (with small legs) on the table.
- mobile arm supports, attached to a wheelchair or table mounted.
- Gutter support clamped to table

##### 2. Cutlery

Grips to enlarge the handles of your ordinary cutlery can be bought, or straps can be bought or made to attach cutlery to the hand. Alternatively, a wide range of specially designed cutlery is available;

- for one-handed use, combining features of knives, forks and spoons.
- with large or easy grip.
- angled or swivelling, for those with restricted wrist movement.

It is important to choose lightweight cutlery.

##### 3. Plates

To avoid pushing food off the plate, try;

- stoneware or plastic plate with deep rim
- a plastic plateguard which clips onto ordinary plates

To keep food warm and palatable, there is an insulated hollow plate that can be filled with hot water.

To stop plates slipping, “Dycem” (plastic non-slip material) is available in the form of table mats or a roll.

##### 4. Cups

Lightweight plastic cups may be easier to manage than conventional china.

Cups with two handles give stability if hands are weak.

Insulated cups keep drinks warm for longer.

A straw is useful if lifting a cup is a problem - “flexistraws” can be bent to the required angle, or extra long plastic tubing can be used.

#### PERSONAL CARE

##### 1. Washing

###### *Taps*

- tap turners which fit most taps
- lever taps (if new taps are to be fitted)

###### *Flannels*

- a flannel mitt
- long-handled sponges or lambswool pads (to reach back and feet)

###### *Soap*

- “soap on a rope”
- soap in panty-hose tied to the tap
- liquid soap in a dispenser
- magnetic or suction soap holder
- tip-up soap dispenser

### **Drying** (a warm room helps here)

- experiment with a small towel with large loops sewn on both ends, so that the whole hand goes through the loop.
- lightweight towelling robe or cape (after bath or shower)
- electric wall-mounted fan dryer (blows warm air onto whole body - luxury!)

### **2. Teeth and Mouth Care**

- toothpaste dispenser
- self-pasting toothbrush
- toothbrush with enlarged handle
- electric toothbrush (must be lightweight - rechargeable type is usually lightest)
- a mouthwash supplements brushing

### **3. Shaving**

- enlarge or lengthen the handle of the razor
- dry shaving may be easier; a rechargeable razor is likely to be lighter in weight
- an electric razor can be mounted on a support and the face moved against it
- have you considered a beard?
- Sitting down to shave may be safer

### **4. Nails**

- nailbrush fixed to basin or wall with suction pads
- easy grip scissors or clippers
- large handled nail file
- nail file attached to table with "blu-tak" or small vice

### **5. Hair**

- washing stand or tray enabling you to sit while a helper washes your hair
- tray, or halo, to enable hair to be washed in bed
- long handled comb

### **6. Head and Neck Support**

There are a number of different braces and supports particularly suitable for MND. Some people use existing designs to make their own. Ask your OT or physiotherapist for advice.

Rigid bracing may restrict eating, swallowing or deep breathing. Oxford type collars may be borrowed from MNDA of SA.

### **HOW TO GET ADVICE AND INFORMATION**

**The Motor Neurone Disease Association** can provide counselling and information about services and resources available.

**Occupational Therapists** can advise on alternate ways of doing things and of the range of equipment available.

**Physiotherapists** are concerned with aiding and maintaining physical functions of the body. Neurophysiotherapists specialise in treatment of conditions such as Motor Neurone Disease.

### **Domiciliary Care and Rehabilitation**

**Services** assist people to remain independent and safe in their homes. (See Fact Sheet 2).

### **The Independent Living Centre (ILC)**

11 Blacks Road, Gilles Plains SA 5086

Tel: 8266 5260

Free Call 1800 800 523

The ILC provides professional advice on equipment (Fact Sheet 3). It is advisable to phone to make an appointment.

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### **For more information, or support, contact**

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