Should You Use Compression Gloves for RA?

by EFFIE KOLIOPOULOS

Compression Gloves for Rheumatoid Arthritis

When I was first diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, my occupational therapist recommended I try something called compression gloves for rheumatoid arthritis. As a young adult entering college, taking care of my hands was not an option, but a priority. Searching for non-invasive ways to improve my quality of life, in addition to conventional methods, was life-changing.

The first compression gloves I came across, IMAK Arthritis Gloves, were featured by the Arthritis Foundation to help relieve aches, pains and stiffness. I did not realize then how important our hands are for accomplishing daily life tasks until I started having issues doing certain activities that were once easy for me to do without much thought.

Being that compression gloves are a non-invasive treatment method, there has not been much scientific research to fully support the effectiveness of them. Though the relief I have personally experienced and those of thousands of other rheumatoid arthritis patients who have tried them too would likely say otherwise.

How They Work

In those diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, the joints of the hands and wrists known as the proximal interphalangeal (PIP) and metacarpophalangeal (MCP) are typically the first areas to show signs and symptoms of pain, inflammation and overall discomfort on movement. Another common symptom people may experience is stiffness, especially upon waking. While medication, alternative treatments and physical and occupational therapy exercises can help, supportive aids in the form of compression gloves can provide great relief as well.

Compression gloves can be recommended by a rheumatologist, primary care doctor, or occupational therapist. The type of glove will depend on the individual needs of the patient. Some individuals may not have any signs of joint damage, making it easy for them to put on the gloves. Others can find them to cause more discomfort because of irreversible joint damage that may not allow for easy access to wearing the gloves.

Depending on which style of glove you choose to use, the way they work is essentially the same. The gloves are typically worn on a regular basis and for a maximum of eight hours. Some patients may choose to wear them less often, depending on their personal preferences.

The most popular glove worn by those with rheumatoid arthritis is the thermal style, which keeps the hands warm while providing support. Another option is more sturdy support that resembles a hand splint. Though with rheumatoid arthritis, symptoms are not always that black and white, and patients may opt to try one that has a combination of these features.

Using compression gloves also requires patience. Don’t expect them to work overnight or be a miracle. Consistency and persistence are the key. Putting them on for a short period of time here and there may not yield

the full benefits. Many wear them overnight to help relieve the morning stiffness that is common among those with RA, and others find it far better to wear them throughout the day during daily tasks, or even both times.

The Benefits and Drawbacks for Those With RA

The only drawback of wearing compression gloves is that they will not help reverse any signs of existing joint damage. It will also not help bring back the normalcy in the function of your hands prior to the diagnosis. Once the gloves come off, the hand issues a person with rheumatoid arthritis experiences typically persist.

This is why adding in other alternative, non-invasive treatment option, along with conventional methods is crucial. Compression gloves are not an item to be used in replacement of any medication or treatment plan, but rather a part of the whole picture. Fortunately, the pros outweigh the cons in this instance.

For one, grip and pinch strength tend to be lower in patients with rheumatoid arthritis compared to the general population without the disease. When flares occur in the hands, gripping and pinching can be unbearable. With the compression gloves, however, it has been found to help in reducing the swelling that leads to stiffness and weakness. Another great benefit is improved blood flow and circulation in the area of the hands, which in turn helps reduce inflammation.

Another overlooked benefit is the amount of support and mobility compression gloves provide. More mobility allows for more flexibility in the joint capsule and surrounding tissues.

Compression gloves can also be mistaken for winter gloves. While they may look similar, the material in gloves is usually made by certain fabrics that are known to help stabilize the structures of the hand. This is not readily found in winter gloves.

Lastly, the styles as mentioned can vary, bringing people more options to choose from based on how busy and active their everyday life is. The fingerless compression glove is useful for those who would like to wear them throughout the day. However, with this style, it is important to keep in mind that the support may not be as strong as the fully covered fingered gloves.

Where You Can Find Them

Before you go on a search for the best compression gloves, it would be wise to seek counsel from your trusted medical team. They may be able to recommend a specific brand for you.
With all the various options out there, it can be quite overwhelming to choose. Though, through trial and error, one can learn what type of glove suits them best.

Making sure the gloves fit properly will ensure that you get the most benefits. Too small and you risk cutting circulation off, which can lead to hand swelling. One trick to avoid this pitfall is to consider moving up one or two sizes, to counterbalance any bad days when flares may arrive. It may be difficult to gauge how the gloves feel on a day when your hands are behaving versus when they are not doing so well, so remember to make room for the good and bad days. Your hands will thank you for it.

For those interested in the top types of arthritis gloves on the market today look no further:

- IMAK Arthritis Gloves
- Thermoskin Premium Arthritis Gloves
- Copper Compression Full Finger Arthritis Gloves
- Vive Arthritis Gloves
- Luniquz Finger Sleeves for Finger Support

These compression gloves for rheumatoid arthritis all will have different fabrics, durability, breathability, flexibility, pain and inflammation relief. There is no right or wrong one, just personal preference. Remember, you will only know if something works for you until you give it a try.