



Essential Tremor (ET) Coping Tips for everyday living

Essential tremor (ET) can turn daily tasks into a test of ingenuity, perseverance and self-esteem. Writing a letter, dressing and eating can cause frustration and lead to stress that temporarily increases tremor. Try these coping tips to make tasks easier to accomplish.

General Suggestions

- Maintain a positive, upbeat attitude and put a smile on your face. It will reduce tension and lighten your mood.
- Stress exacerbates tremor. Use deep breathing exercises or meditation to help reduce stress levels and remain calm.
- Learn to use your tremor-free hand for as many activities as possible, including writing.
- Use your tremor-free hand to steady your trembling hand and use two hands when possible.
- Keep your elbows close to your body when performing tasks as a way to help control hand tremor.
- Use travel mugs with lids. When on the go, use lids for purchased beverages whenever possible.
- Carry straws with you. You can find sturdy, thick, plastic straws in many housewares sections of stores if thin plastic straws are too flimsy.
- Avoid caffeine, ma huang, ephedra, and other over-the-counter medications and herbs containing ingredients that increase heart rate. They can cause a temporary increase in tremor.
- Carry and use weighted pens and eating utensils with large handles.
- Talk to people about ET and explain what it is. Education raises awareness and fosters understanding.
- Don't be afraid or embarrassed to ask for help. Tell others you have ET and ask them to help you reach for groceries on high store shelves, ask cashiers in cafeterias to help bring the tray to your table, or ask relatives or friends to cut meat or lettuce for you.
- Before doing fine, detailed tasks with your hands, avoid heavy lifting or strenuous activity.
- When reading, place the newspaper or book on a table rather than holding it.
- Tear paper using a sharp-edged ruler or use scissors while holding your hands close to your body.
- Do tasks slowly. Try to focus and concentrate on the task at hand.
- Take an active role in your local support group. Ask if you can assist the leader in any way. Sometimes when we help others, we end up helping ourselves.

Writing

- Print rather than write script.
- Write in small letters—it's easier than writing in large letters.
- Rest the heel of your palm on the writing surface and your forearm on a table while writing.
- Make sure your writing surface is level.
- Hold the pen between your index and middle finger.
- Place writing paper on a newspaper, envelope or heavyweight paper to help control shaking movements and avoid ripping the paper.
- Use a ruler as a guide under your palm to keep lines straight.
- Use a pen or pencil with a thick, rubberized grip.
- Rather than writing, carry a recording device with you to record notes.
- When possible, type messages rather than writing them.
- Do math on a calculator rather than on paper.

Head Tremor

- Hold your chin in your hand(s) or toward your chest, or turn your head to the side to steady your head.
 - When conversing, hold your head to the side, not straight ahead. Also, turn your body slightly and turn your head toward the other person.
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Essential Tremor (ET)

Coping Tips

Eating, Drinking and Food Preparation

- Use heavier glasses and mugs with lids instead of light-weight cups. Soup mugs are also a good choice for drinking.
- When holding a mug or small glass, place your thumb along the rim and place your fingers across the bottom.
- Fill cups, mugs and glasses half full.
- Use dishes that have vertical sides or buy rubber bumper guards from a medical supply store to place around the edges of your plates so food is easier to scoop.
- Use covered ice-cube trays.
- Get a rubberized placemat that sticks to the table so plates do not slide.
- When pouring or measuring liquids or solids into an eating or storage container, put the container in the sink and pour down into it. For instance, when measuring ground coffee, put the grounds into a measuring cup in the sink and pour them into the basket or filter.
- If necessary, use a bib or napkin to prevent food from soiling clothes.
- Put your microwave on a countertop or low table so you can easily place food inside and remove it.
- Use Chinese soup spoons which have a larger bowl and are heavier than standard spoons.

Restaurants

- Request that your meat be cut in the kitchen before being served.
- Order finger foods to eliminate the need for utensils.
- Ask that your soup be served in a mug.
- Request that your drinking glass or mug be filled only half full.
- Ask for a straw or carry some with you.
- Avoid buffets or have someone assist you when going through the line.
- Add crackers or pieces of bread to a thin soup to thicken it and make it less likely to spill.
- Order mashed potatoes so you can move smaller pieces of food (peas, etc.) into the potatoes to make them easier to pick up.
- Use two hands to hold cups, soup bowls, etc.

Business and Banking

- Use a signature stamp when possible to sign your name. (Check with your banking institution to ensure they will accept a stamp on your financial documents.)
- If possible, sign forms using your initials rather than your full name.
- Carry a strip of self-adhesive address labels, to use when asked for contact information.
- Fill out deposit and withdrawal slips at home before going to the bank.
- Use online banking to pay your monthly bills.
- Use credit or debit cards instead of writing checks.
- If you write checks, do them all on a “good” tremor day.
- When paying with cash, ask the cashier to put the coins in your hand and the bills on top so the coins won’t fall.
- Ask the receptionist or teller to help you fill out forms.
- Print personal business cards listing your name, address, phone/cell numbers, e-mail address, etc.
- When speaking before audiences, keep your hands and arms close to your side or keep your hands in your pockets. Explain to the audience you have ET. Insert paper notes into plastic sheets and put them in a loose leaf notebook so they won’t rattle.

Be who you are and say what you feel, because those who matter don't mind, and those that mind, don't matter.

-Dr. Seuss



Essential Tremor (ET)

Coping Tips

Telephones

- Use a telephone with large buttons. Avoid phones with speed dial and redial buttons too close to the number buttons.
- Use a speakerphone, headset or Bluetooth® device when using phones.
- Keep a small recording device next to the phone so you can record information when talking on the phone.
- Use voice-activated dialing, if available, on your cell phone.
- Adjust the touch screen interface on your Android phone or iPhone in order to use features that will better accommodate your ET.

Computers

- Set your computer to omit double-strikes and repeat characters on the key board and double-clicks and tracking speed on the mouse. If you use a PC, go to your computer's Control Panel and click on the Ease of Access Center to set these options. On a MAC, go to your System Preferences.
- Rest the heel of your palms on the surface in front of the keyboard.
- Go to a store selling a number of different types of computer mouse. Try them out and choose the one that works best for you.
- Check into speech-recognition software. Some computers are pre-loaded with this.

Other Technology

- Ask your security alarm representative to give you a remote to turn your system on and off.
- When choosing a digital camera, pick one with image stabilization technology.
- Use a tripod or camera stand when taking pictures.
- When using a digital camera, use the optical viewfinder so you can hold the camera close against your body.
- For unattended parking garages where you must insert a thin cardboard ticket into a slot: slip the ticket into a firm plastic card protector and extend the ticket an inch or so outside the plastic cover. If necessary, exit the vehicle and brace your arm against your body. Place the exposed ticket end into the slot and retract the plastic cover as the ticket is pulled into the slot.

When you become detached mentally from yourself and concentrate on helping other people with their difficulties, you will be able to cope with your own more effectively. Somehow, the act of self-giving is a personal power-releasing factor.

-Norman Vincent Peale

Airport Security

Getting through airport security can be especially difficult for people with ET. It can be a frustrating, intimidating experience. That's why it is important to be prepared.

- Give yourself plenty of time to arrive well before your flight so you do not have to rush through security.
- When dressing for air travel, wear slip-on shoes that are easy to remove and easy to put back on afterward.

Before entering security:

- Have a plastic bag ready so you can place everything you usually carry in your pockets, such as coins, keys and cell phone, into it.
- Take your belt off (or don't wear one).
- Have your ID and other travel documents together and in your hand.



Essential Tremor (ET) Coping Tips

Dental Visits

- Ask for adrenaline-free anesthesia shots.
- Notify your dentist of all medications you are taking.

Head tremor only

- Request that your dentist stop periodically so you can massage and rest your jaw and head.
- Ask your dentist whether a bite block will help steady your jaw during dental procedures.
- Talk with your dentist about having a person in addition to the dental assistant help with your procedure. The third person can gently hold your head to help control tremor.

Personal Care

- Use an electric razor when shaving.
- Have a manicurist care for your nails.
- Have a cosmetologist wax or pluck your eyebrows.
- Use disposable floss holders when flossing your teeth.
- Hire a seamstress to do your mending, or find a volunteer to sew on buttons, thread needles and pin fabrics.
- Use Velcro® fasteners rather than buttons.
- Use a buttoning aid (a pencil-like device) with a wire hook at the end.
- Use an electric toothbrush or a child's toothbrush for better control when brushing your teeth.
- Put toothpaste on a toothbrush by laying the tube on the counter and push from the bottom of the tube onto the bristles. Or squeeze some into a cup and stick your toothbrush in the cup to apply.
- To put drops into your eyes or nose, hold your elbow with your other hand, or try lying flat.

Applying Makeup and Putting on Jewelry

- Apply mascara by resting your elbows on the countertop. Put the wand in one hand and use the other hand to keep the wand steady.
- Apply eyebrow pencil, mascara, eyeliner or lipstick by resting your finger or the palm of your hand on your face to steady your hand.
- Put on earrings by resting your elbows on a table.
- If you have head tremor, place your chin on an upended facial tissue box to steady your head.

Cheerfulness is the best promoter of health and is as friendly to the mind as to the body.

-Joseph Addison

Thank you to the Northbrook, IL Support Group and our IETF members for providing these helpful tips.

Email your coping tips to info@essentialtremor.org.

This information is not intended to replace your current medical therapy. Discuss your difficulties with your physician or other healthcare professional in order to help develop a well-rounded treatment plan that is right for you.



Your Voice for Essential Tremor

Our Mission

To provide hope to the essential tremor community worldwide through awareness, education, support and research.