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A Few Adaptive Paddling Tips For Persons with Disabilities, Sports Injuries & Joint Pain

Every one of us should be adaptive paddlers. Outfit your boat to fit your body. Learn to paddle with good form and technique! Proper posture while kayaking will solve and prevent many physical discomforts. I also can't say enough about the benefits of an occupational or physical therapist, or a personal trainer. Learn how to use your body correctly, how to build needed muscles, and what not to do while performing certain tasks so you don't get injured. Whether you chose to work out in a gym, or get exercises to take home, it is imperative that you keep your body as strong and limber as possible. Finally, get excellent kayak instruction. I have an obvious bias here. Make sure the instructor has been certified with a recognized organization such as the ACA, BCU, or CRCA. These folks have had training and experience in teaching you how to kayak. If possible take instruction with someone who is familiar with your needs & abilities and has the training to help you.

Simple Solutions for Sea Kayakers:

PAIN/PROBLEMS

SEE # BELOW

BACK	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21
FOOT	1, 2, 5, 6, 11, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21
HAND or WRIST	1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21
HIP/SIATIC NERVE	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20
SHOULDER	1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21
BRAIN INJURY/MEMORY	11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 21
LACK OF TORSO STABILITY	5, 6, 7, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20, 21
KNEE	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 16, 21

- 1) Sit up straight or lean slightly forward. Do not slouch or lean back. Replace a hard kayak seat back with a backband or carve minicell foam to fit your back. Try a self-inflating lumbar support between your back and the seat back or band.
- 2) Use under-thigh supports. There are several on the market. Some inflate and others are made of foam. You can carve your own foam or roll up a sleeping or yoga pad and place it under your thighs. Be sure the support is easily removable or flattens down out of your way to avoid entrapment in a capsized.
- 3) Engage your lower body while paddling. Push gently with one or both feet as your paddle catches the water to get leverage in your strokes, achieve better torso rotation, and use your larger muscles (glutes and quads) to help push the boat forward. Relax that foot as your paddle exits and you wind up your torso for the catch on the other side. Your forward stroke will improve and blood will flow to your lower body. It's sort of like doing isometric exercises with your quadriceps and gluteus maximus muscles. Exception: DO NOT PERFORM TORSO ROTATIONS FOR BACK PROBLEMS UNLESS YOUR PHYSICIAN AND PHYSICAL THERAPIST RECOMMEND THEM.
- 4) Try raising or lowering your seat bottom. Try a gel or foam seat pad. If you remove the stock seat you may have to make some side supports to hold the kayak's structural integrity. Carve ethafoam, line it with neoprene, ensolite or minicell foam and wedge it in at your hip area between the deck and the hull.
- 5) Replace uncomfortable foot pegs with a whitewater style bulkhead or carve ethafoam to make a bulkhead, experiment with the best angle (normally one's toes should be

- slightly forward). Place a float bag between the existing bulkhead and your new footbrace bulkhead. Wedge the ethafoam in place and duct tape secure. You can pad it with softer minicell or ensolite foam.
- 6) If you have a rudder you need your footpegs. You can do the above method behind your existing footpegs, just raise the middle portion of your new bulkhead to rest your feet on when not using the rudder. Another option is to make a larger, softer foot peg with minicell foam. Sand the foam to the best angle and shape for your foot. Use contact cement to adhere it to a rigid piece of sheet plastic or epoxy-impregnated marine plywood. Drill a hole in your kayak's footbrace and screw the new pad in place on top of the existing one.
 - 7) Purchase the lightest paddle you can afford.
 - 8) Try a different paddle or technique. Try a foam core, bent-shaft, or Greenland style paddle. Smaller bladed paddles will carry less load and be easier to use. Try a shorter or longer paddle. Try changing the angle of your paddle shaft (more touring or power stroke angle). Try unfeathered .
 - 9) Pipe foam insulation can be taped to the shaft for a larger grip.
 - 10) Modify strokes. i.e.: slide the paddle blade towards you rather than a "wrist flick" to retrieve your paddle from a brace, sweep roll rather than C to C.
 - 11) Stay in the Paddler's Box. Always. Even out of the kayak. Keep your hands in the plane of your shoulders.
 - 12) The art of kayaking relies on kinesthetic memory. Get good instruction. Get on the water and have the instructor help with good technique and form. Verbal instruction should be simple. Do on-land exercises that reinforce good technique. Get good technique into muscle memory. It's like learning to eat with a fork. Once you learn to eat with a fork you don't think about how to pick it up or use it. You just eat.
 - 13) Outfit your cockpit to fit your body. You need supportive points of contact at the hips, lower back, thighs, and feet. Carve minicell foam to fit your body or check with a local kayak retailer to see what is available for outfitting your kayak.
 - 14) Carve foam, use folded camping or yoga pads to wrap behind and at your sides to add torso stability. Try a neoprene back or lumbar brace/corset.
 - 15) Wear wrist braces to keep your hands aligned with your forearm.
 - 16) Have a relaxed grip, rather than a "death grip" on your paddle shaft.
 - 17) Perfect your forward stroke to the best of your ability. Don't "bicycle" with your arms. Use major muscles, leverage, and torso rotation. Take quality strokes.
 - 18) Attach a piece of bicycle inner tube to your paddle shaft with zip ties (it will look like an inch worm) to keep your hand in place. You want to be able to slip your fingers under it as you grip the shaft. Make sure it is loose enough to easily slip your hand out again.
 - 19) Pad under your heels for cushion and support using neoprene or soft foam.
 - 20) Try a kayak with a lower deck to drop your hands lower in your lap.
 - 21) For more Adaptive Paddling hints purchase Canoeing and Kayaking for Persons with Disabilities Instruction Manual from the American Canoe Association (ACA) by Janet Zeller and Anne Worthem Weber. www.acanet.org

Notes: 1) Kayaking is dangerous. You can drown in an inch of water. The above suggestions may or may not be suitable for your individual needs. Check with your physician before undertaking the sport of kayaking or making outfitting adjustments to paddles or boats. 2) The above suggestions and adaptations may or may not work with recreational, sit-on-top, or whitewater kayaks. 3) Be sure you are properly trained in the use of tools and materials before making any adaptations. 4) You can ruin your kayak if the wrong thing is cut or drilled. 5) Always use your best judgment. You are the expert when it comes to your own body, health, and capabilities.

