

## Rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease that causes inflammation and damage to the joints. It causes the immune system to attack the synovial membrane (tissue that covers the joints). It also increases the risk of osteoporosis and can affect other organs such as the eyes, heart and lungs.

### Symptoms

In most cases, rheumatoid arthritis affects the joints on both sides of the body. Signs and symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis are as follows:

- Pain and stiffness, particularly morning stiffness, in the joints that last for more than an hour.
- Loss of movement in the joints
- muscle fatigue or weakness.
- Fever
- Firm, rounded lumps
- Over time, the joints may lose movement and become deformed.

Symptoms can sometimes get worse; this is known as a crisis. At other times, where symptoms improve, this is known as remission.



### Risk factors

- **Age:** It can occur at any age but increases with age. It usually occurs between the ages of 60 and 69.
- **Being female:** Rheumatoid arthritis generally occurs more often in women.
- **Family History:** It increases the likelihood of developing rheumatoid arthritis if a close family member (mother, father, grandparents, etc.) has the condition.
- **Smoking:** Increases the risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis and/or worsening the disease.

- **Obesity:** Being obese or overweight may increase the risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis.

### Diagnosis

It can be difficult for a doctor to make a diagnosis in the early stages of rheumatoid arthritis, as the symptoms may resemble other diseases.

The doctor may do several physical assessments to check joints, reflexes and muscle strength. To confirm a diagnosis, the following additional tests are performed:

- **Blood Test:** Will determine if there is any inflammation or infection.
- **X-rays:** To record images of the joint that is causing pain and check for inflammation.



### Treatment

- **Antirheumatics:** Help slow progression; relieve pain, stiffness and inflammation.
- **Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs):** Help reduce inflammation, pain and fever. Notify your doctor if you are allergic to aspirin.
- **Steroids:** Help to reduce inflammation.
- **Biological therapy:** Relieves inflammation, pain and joint stiffness. It consists of injectable solutions administered under the skin or into a vein.
- **Surgery:** A procedure to remove part or all of a joint and insert an artificial joint.

It may also be done if you have an infection in the joint or if the bones of the spine are putting pressure on the nerves.

### Symptom management

A person with rheumatoid arthritis can take steps for symptom management and body care.

These are:

- Physical and occupational therapy, using assistive devices.
- Rest
- Heat and cold treatments.
- Physical activity. Consult with your doctor about the exercise regimen that is right for you.



### Social and Emocional

For recommendations, tools and resources on how you and your family can cope with the emotional and physical concerns that arise during and after medical treatment, please visit your primary care physician or contact the following phone lines:

#### Medical Advice Line

1-844-347-7801

**TTY/TDD** 1-844-347-7804

#### APS Health

787-641-9133

### References:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/arthritis/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20350777>

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/symptoms-causes/syc-20353648>

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000431.htm>

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