

Rheumatoid arthritis



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

Symptoms

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

- Pain and stiffness, particularly in the morning, in the joints that last more than an hour.
- Loss of movement in the joints.
- Fatigue or muscle weakness.
- Fever.
- Firm, round nodules in the joints.
- Loss of appetite or weight loss.
- Over time, joints can lose movement and become deformed.

Symptoms can sometimes get worse; this is known as a meltdown. At other times, when symptoms improve, it is known as *remission*.



Risk factors

- **Age:** It can occur at any age; however, it increases over the years. It usually occurs between the ages of 60 and 69.
- **Being a Woman:** Rheumatoid arthritis occurs most often in women.
- **Family History:** The likelihood of suffering from rheumatoid arthritis increases if a close relative (mothers, fathers, grandparents, etc.) suffers from the condition.
- **Smoking:** Increases the risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis and/or worsening the disease.
- **Obesity:** Being obese or overweight may increase your risk of 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 be similar to other diseases. Your doctor may do several physical exams to check your joints, reflexes, and muscle strength. To confirm a diagnosis, additional tests are performed:

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



Treatment

- **Antirheumatics:** Help slow progress; relieve pain, stiffness, and inflammation.
- **Nonsteroidal Anti-inflammatory Pain Relievers (NSAIDs):** Help decrease inflammation, pain, and fever. Notify your doctor if you are allergic to aspirin.
- **Steroids:** Help decrease inflammation.
- **Biological Therapy:** Relieves inflammation, pain, and stiffness in the joints. It consists of injectable solutions that are administered under the skin or into a vein.
- **Surgery:** A procedure to remove part or all of the joint and place an artificial one. It may also be done if you have an infection in your joint or if the bones in your spine are pressing on your nerves.

Symptom Management

A person with rheumatoid arthritis can take steps to manage symptoms and care for the body.

These are:

- Physical and occupational therapy, using assistive devices.
- Rest.
- Heat and cold treatments.
- Physical activity. Talk to your doctor about the exercise regimen that's best for you.



Social and Emotional Aspect

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 call the following phone lines:

Medical Advice Line

1-844-347-7801

TTY/TDD 1-844-347-7804

APS Health

787-641-9133

References:

<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/rheumatoidarthritis.html>

<https://www.merckmanuals.com/es-us/hogar/trastornos-de-los-huesos-articulaciones-y-m%C3%BAsculos/enfermedades-articulares/artritis-reumatoide>

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