

UNDERSTANDING RA

RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

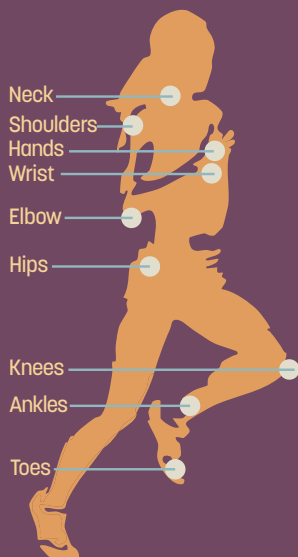
Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a disease that causes joints to become painful and stiff. It can happen to people of any age, even young people. Starting treatment early can make a big difference in protecting your joints. RA lasts a lifetime, but with the right care, you can continue to enjoy life - balancing activity with rest so your body can stay as healthy as possible.

WHO GETS RA?

About 1.5 million people in the U.S. have RA

- ✓ RA is rare. Only about 1 out of every 100 people develops RA.
- ✓ RA can start at any age. In most cases, RA starts between the ages of 30-60.
- ✓ RA affects both men and women, but it is more common in women.
- ✓ People who have a family member with RA are a little more likely to develop RA.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF RA?



- Pain, swelling and stiffness in many joints
- Joint stiffness that lasts for more than an hour in the mornings
- Sometimes, RA can affect other parts of the body, like the eyes or lungs, but this is not as common
- Fatigue

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE RA?

- RA can be diagnosed by your doctor or by an arthritis specialist (called a rheumatologist.)
- Doctors make the diagnosis by asking you questions, looking at your joints, and doing a few blood tests and x-rays.
- It is very important to recognize RA as soon as possible so that treatment can be started.

Treating RA early reduces pain and protects your joints from permanent damage



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HOW IS RA TREATED?

The earlier treatment is started, the better!
Early treatment can prevent permanent joint damage.

Treating RA involves a combination of:

- ✓ Medication
- ✓ Physical therapy
- ✓ Gentle Exercise
- ✓ Diet
- ✓ Restful sleep
- ✓ Support from family and friends

What medications are used to treat RA?

There are many safe and effective medications for RA. The medications work by calming down the swelling and inflammation inside the joints. Some medications work right away to help you feel better quickly. Others are long-term medications that help keep RA under control over your lifetime. Opioids (such as hydrocodone, oxycodone, codeine, or morphine) are not recommended treatments for RA. Your doctor will work with you to find the right treatment for you.

QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

? **Isn't arthritis a problem of old age?**
Not always. There are different kinds of arthritis. RA is one type that can occur at any age, even in children.

? **Does RA always cause the joints to become deformed and twisted?**
No. Today there are many excellent treatments available for RA – when treatments are started early and taken regularly, the symptoms of RA can be well controlled.

? **If I have RA, will I pass it on to my children?**
Not necessarily. Having a family member with RA increases the chances of having RA, but it is still unlikely.

? **Is there a cure for RA?**
Not yet. Although there is no cure for RA, people with RA can live a long and active life with the right treatment.

