

Rheumatoid Arthritis

What is Rheumatoid Arthritis?

- RA is a chronic (long-term) disease that causes pain, stiffness, swelling, and limited motion and function of many joints.
- RA can affect any joint with the small joints in the hands and feet being the most common.
- Stiffness seen with RA is most often worst in the morning, lasting 1-2 hours or even the whole day.
- Another symptom can include firm lumps, called rheumatoid nodules, which grow beneath the skin on the hands and elbows.

What causes Rheumatoid Arthritis?

- Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease that the body's defense system sets off.
- Swelling occurs in the tissue that lines the joint, called the synovium, and this inflammation is caused by the release of chemicals that cause damage to the cartilage and bone.

How is Rheumatoid Arthritis diagnosed?

- A physical exam is required to review symptoms such as warmth, swelling, and pain in the joints.
- Blood tests that help with the diagnosis of RA are Rheumatoid factor, anti-CCP, and ESR.
- X-rays help to detect RA as well as track the progress of the disease.

Fast facts

- RA is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system does not work correctly. The disease causes attack of healthy tissue in the joints.
- RA is the most common type of autoimmune arthritis which affects the joints.
- Treatments have improved greatly and help many of those affected.

How is Rheumatoid Arthritis treated?

- There is no cure for RA. The goal of treatment is to reduce symptoms, improve your daily function, and slow the progress of your disease. No single treatment works for all patients.
- Treatment with disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs) should be started
- Common DMARDs include methotrexate, leflunomide, hydroxychloroquine, sulfasalazine.
- For more serious disease you may need a medication called a biologic.
- Biologics include abatacept, adalimumab, anakinra, certolizumab, etanercept, golimumab, infliximab, rituximab, and tocilizumab.

Points to remember

- Newer treatments are effective and help improve the disease.
- Start treatment early. The earlier you are treated the better you feel and the more likely you will lead an active life.

For additional information

- The Arthritis Foundation – **www.arthritis.org**
- National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin – **www.niams.nih.gov**
- The Rheumatology Research Foundation – **www.rheumatology.org/Foundation**