

# Rheumatoid Arthritis: Chronic Inflammatory Autoimmune Disease

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## Abstract

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease in which the body attacks the lining tissue of joints, causing chronic joint inflammation. Primarily it affects joints; it can also cause inflammation of organs, such as the lungs, eyes, skin, and heart.

People may experience an increase in symptoms, called "flares," that can last for days or weeks. They may also have periods of remission where they have few or no symptoms. There is no cure for rheumatoid arthritis, but medications can stop the progression of the disease and ease symptoms.

Several risk factors have been identified. Women are diagnosed with RA more often, and it is suspected that the hormone estrogen may play a role. Several studies have shown there is a genetic component to developing RA. Cigarette smoking appears to increase the risk of developing the disease. Occupational exposure to certain dusts such as silica, wood, or asbestos can also lead to a higher risk for developing the illness.

Hands are almost always affected in Rheumatoid Arthritis. However, RA can affect any joint in your body, including wrists, elbows, knees, feet, hips, and even the jaw. Usually, joints are affected. Rheumatoid arthritis can be very painful, and chronic inflammation can lead to debilitating loss of cartilage, bone weakness, and joint deformity.

It is increasingly recognized that there is a 'window of opportunity' within which disease modifying antirheumatic drug therapy should be commenced to arrest progressive disease and joint destruction. Methotrexate is usually the first line agent in the management of rheumatoid arthritis but simple analgesia and nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are also important for symptom control.

Arthritis can't be reversed, but it can be managed. If you have arthritis, but you don't feel like your current treatment is working, call your doctor. You may need to try a different type of treatment. With the right kind of care, you can manage your arthritis and live a productive life.

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