

RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS (RA) – GET THE FACTS

RA Increases the Risk of Heart Attack and Stroke

People with RA Are Two Times More Likely to Suffer From Depression

There are many types of arthritis; Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is the most common form and typically affects the wrists and small joints of the hand. Studies show that early treatment is essential to lessening joint damage.

This article has been prepared to help patients learn the early signs of RA, how a patient is diagnosed and what treatment options are available.

01 | Early Signs

Due to its progressive nature, RA may begin with subtle yet specific symptoms, including swelling and stiffness in the fingers. These symptoms are usually intermittent. Other early signs may include:

- Fatigue
- Low-grade fever
- Pain and stiffness lasting more than 30 minutes
- Anemia
- Weight loss

02 | Diagnosis

RA can be hard to diagnose due to the range of symptoms and their severity from patient to patient. It is important, therefore, to visit a Rheumatologist if you are experiencing any of the above-referenced symptoms. Although there is no single test that confirms RA, your medical provider will perform a physical exam, checking for pain, swelling and warmth of the joints, and will also request lab work and imaging tests to make a diagnosis of RA and to rule out other potential diseases.

03 | Treatment

Treatment is indicated for the improvement of symptoms and well-being of the patient, as well as slowing the progression of the disease and may include the following:

- **Medications** – Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), steroids, biologic agents and disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)

can relieve pain and reduce inflammation and slow the progression of RA.

- **Therapy** – physical or occupational therapy may be recommended to teach you exercises to keep the joints flexible and new ways to perform daily tasks, which will be easier on your joints.
- **Surgery** – if medications have not prevented joint damage, your medical provider may recommend surgery to repair damaged joints. Surgery can reduce pain, correct deformities and restore your ability to use the joint.
- **Alternative Medicine** – in addition to prescription medications, many healthcare providers recommend the use of fish and plant oils to reduce pain and inflammation of the joints.

04 | Lifestyle Changes

Although it can be painful to keep moving, it is important to keep physically active. Low-impact exercise, like walking and water aerobics help build muscle strength which, in turn, reduces pressure on the joints. Adhering to your treatment plan, medications and physical therapy are all important to your well-being and in slowing the progression of RA.

For additional information, please visit:

<http://www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver/Diseases-Conditions/Rheumatoid-Arthritis>

Did You Know?
1.3 Million Americans Have Rheumatoid Arthritis

References

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/diagnosis-treatment/treatment/txc-20197400>