

# WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

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## What is Rheumatoid Arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) happens when your body's defense system—the immune system—attacks your joints and causes them to become painful and swollen. Joints are where 2 or more bones join together, such as at your hands, wrists, feet, or knees. RA usually causes inflamed joints on both sides of your body.

## Am I at Risk?

RA is more common in women than in men. It may occur at any age, but is most common in older adults. Other risk factors include:

- Having a family member with RA
- Cigarette smoking
- Being overweight
- Unhealthy diet
- Poor dental health

## What Are the Symptoms?

- Joint pain or stiffness on both sides of your body, especially in the hands, wrists, feet, or knees
- Joint pain or stiffness lasting more than a few weeks
- Stiffness or pain that is worse in the morning, lasts for more than 1 hour, and improves during the day
- Feeling tired and unwell

## How Is It Diagnosed?

- Your health care provider will ask you questions about your symptoms and medical history.
- You will have a physical examination.
- You will have simple blood tests.
- You might also get an imaging test, like an X-ray or ultrasound.
- You might be referred to a rheumatologist. This is a doctor who specializes in diseases of the joints, muscles, and bones.

## How Is It treated?

Early diagnosis and treatment are important to stopping joint pain and preventing long-term damage to your joints.



- There are several medicines available that can keep your RA from getting worse and help you with your symptoms. Talk to your health care provider about which one is best for you.
- Your provider might also talk to you about physical or occupational therapy. Occupational therapy may help you work and do daily activities.
- Exercise is safe and may help you feel better.
- If you smoke, ask your health care provider to help you quit.

## Questions for My Doctor

- If I have swollen joints, does that mean that I have RA?
- How will my symptoms change over time?
- What medicines are best for me?
- What are the side effects of the medicines?
- Will other medicines interact with my RA medicines?
- What exercise is safe for me to do?
- Should I see a physical or occupational therapist?
- Do I need to see any other doctors?

## For More Information



### Medline Plus

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

### National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

[www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/rheumatoid-arthritis](http://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/rheumatoid-arthritis)