

# THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

## What is rheumatoid arthritis?

- Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a long-term disease in which the body's immune system attacks the joints and causes them to become inflamed. This leads to swelling, pain, and stiffness.
- RA most often affects feet, hands, wrists, and knees, but it can affect any joint and sometimes internal organs. The effects are usually symmetrical, affecting the same joints on both sides of the body.
- In the long-term, RA can permanently deform and damage joints.

## What are some symptoms of RA?

- Joint swelling and tenderness
- Stiffness and pain lasting more than 30 minutes in the morning
- Symmetrical pattern of affected joints, most often in the wrist and finger joints
- Joint malalignment and loss of motion
- Fatigue and a general sense of feeling unwell

## If I have swollen joints, does that mean I have rheumatoid arthritis?

- Many people have temporarily swollen joints, such as after a viral infection. See your doctor if the joint swelling lasts more than 6 weeks.
- Many conditions besides RA can lead to widespread musculoskeletal discomfort, such as psoriatic arthritis or gout, systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), scleroderma, osteoarthritis, and fibromyalgia.
- Your doctor will assess your symptoms to determine whether RA or another condition is causing the symptoms.



## For More Information

<http://community.arthritis.org/community/raconnect.htm>  
[www.arthritis.org/disease-center.php?disease\\_id=31](http://www.arthritis.org/disease-center.php?disease_id=31)  
Arthritis Foundation: information, education, and support resources for people with rheumatoid arthritis

[www.niams.nih.gov/Health\\_Info/Rheumatic\\_Disease/rheumatoid\\_arthritis\\_ff.asp](http://www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Rheumatic_Disease/rheumatoid_arthritis_ff.asp)  
National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases: What Is Rheumatoid Arthritis?

[www.rheumatology.org/practice/clinical/patients/diseases\\_and\\_conditions/ra.asp](http://www.rheumatology.org/practice/clinical/patients/diseases_and_conditions/ra.asp) (English)  
[www.rheumatology.org/practice/clinical/patients/diseases\\_and\\_conditions/ra-esp.asp](http://www.rheumatology.org/practice/clinical/patients/diseases_and_conditions/ra-esp.asp) (Spanish)  
American College of Rheumatology: Rheumatoid Arthritis

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