

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is also known as RA. It is an autoimmune and inflammatory disease. This means that your immune system attacks healthy cells in your body. This is done by mistake. This causes painful swelling in parts of the body.

RA mainly attacks the joints. It usually attacks many joints at once. RA commonly affects joints in the hands, wrists, and knees. The lining of the joint becomes inflamed. This causes damage to joint tissue. This tissue damage can cause long lasting or chronic pain. It can cause unsteadiness. This is a lack of balance. It can also cause deformity. This means misshapeness.

Symptoms

With RA, there are times when symptoms get worse. This is known as flares. There are also times when symptoms get better. This is known as remission.

Signs include:

- Pain or aching in more than one joint.
- Stiffness in more than one joint.
- Tenderness and swelling in more than one joint.
- The same symptoms on both sides of the body (such as in both hands or both knees).
- Weight loss.
- Fever.
- Fatigue, or tiredness.
- Weakness.

Causes

- **Age.** RA can start at any age. But likelihood increases with age. The onset is highest among adults in their sixties.
- **Sex.** New cases are typically two-to-three times higher in women than men.
- **Genetics/inherited traits.** People born with certain genes are more likely to develop RA. These genes are called HLA (human leukocyte antigen) class II genotypes. They can make your arthritis worse. The risk may be highest when people with these genes are exposed to environmental factors. Such as smoking. Or when a person is obese.
- **Smoking.** Many studies show that smoking raises a person's risk. It can make the disease worse.
- **History of live births.** Women who have never given birth may be at greater risk.
- **Early Life Exposures.** Some early life exposures may raise risk of developing RA in adulthood. For example, one study found that children whose mothers smoked had double the risk of developing it as adults. Children of lower income parents are at increased risk of developing it as adults.
- **Obesity.** Being obese can raise the risk. Studies examining the role of obesity also found that the more overweight a person was, the higher his or her risk became.

Treatment

RA can be treated. It can be managed with meds and self-management strategies. Treatment usually is the use of meds which slow disease and prevent joint deformity. These are called disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs). Biological response modifiers are meds that are an effective second-line treatment. People can manage their RA with self-management strategies. They are proven to reduce pain and disability. This lets them do the activities important to them. People with RA can relieve pain and improve joint function. Just by learning to use five simple and effective strategies.