

## Rheumatoid Arthritis

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

**What is rheumatoid arthritis?** Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a long-term autoimmune disease that causes inflammation and damage to joints. RA causes body's immune system to attack the synovial membrane (lining) in joints. RA can also affect other organs, such as eyes, heart, or lungs. It may also increase risk for osteoporosis (weakened bones).

### What increases my risk for RA?

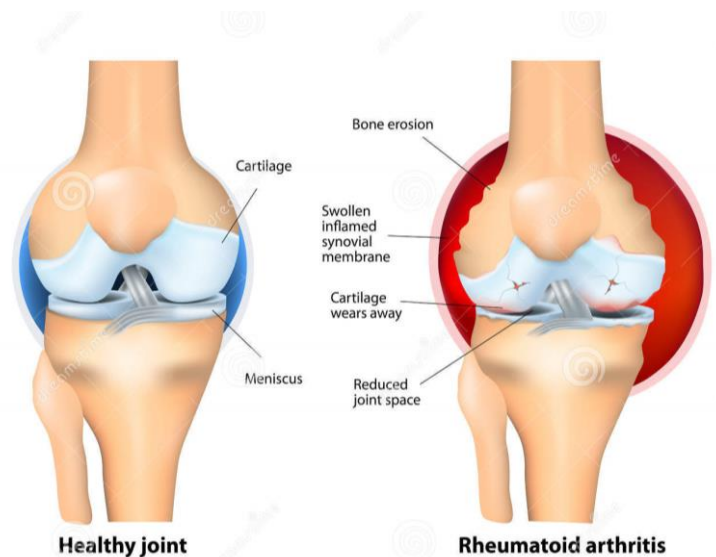
- Being a woman
- A family history of RA
- Age between 30 and 60 years old
- Smoking cigarettes

### What are the signs and symptoms of RA?

- Joint pain and stiffness that lasts longer than 1 hour
- Swollen joints in the same joint on both sides of your body
- Loss of joint movement
- Firm, round nodules (growths) on joints
- Fatigue or muscle weakness
- Loss of appetite or weight loss

### How is RA diagnosed?

- **Blood tests** may be used to check for signs of infection or inflammation.
- **X-ray or MRI** pictures may be taken of the bones and tissues in joints. Person may be given contrast liquid as a shot into the joint to help joint show up better. Do not enter the MRI room with anything metal. Metal can cause serious injury.
- **Arthrocentesis** is a procedure used to drain fluid out of a joint. The fluid is tested for infection or other problems that can cause arthritis.
- **Synovial biopsy** may be used if joint fluid cannot be drained or if have signs of an infection. A piece of tissue is removed from the lining of a joint. The tissue is tested for possible causes of arthritis.



## How is RA treated?

- **Medicines:**
  - **Antirheumatics** help slow the progress of RA, and reduce pain, stiffness, and inflammation.
  - **NSAIDs**, such as ibuprofen, help decrease swelling, pain, and fever. NSAIDs can cause stomach bleeding or kidney problems in certain people. If patient take blood thinner medicine
  - **Steroids:** This medicine may be given to decrease inflammation.
  - **Biologic therapy** helps decrease joint swelling, pain, and stiffness. These medicines increase the risk of serious infection. Doctor will need to monitor closely while taking these medicines.
- **Surgery** may be done to take out all or part of the joint and put in an artificial joint. This may help reduce pain and repair the joint. Surgery may also be done if patient have a joint infection or if the bones in spine are pressing on nerves.

## What can we do to manage symptoms?

- **Go to physical and occupational therapy as directed.** A physical therapist can teach exercises to help improve movement and strength, and to decrease pain. An occupational therapist can teach skills to help with daily activities.
- **Use support devices as directed.** Patient may be given splints to wear on hands to help joints rest and to decrease inflammation
- **Rest when needed.** Rest is important if joints are painful. Limit activities until symptoms improve. Gradually start normal activities when person can do them without pain. Avoid motions and activities that cause strain on joints, such as heavy exercise and lifting.
- **Use ice or heat.** Both can help decrease swelling and pain. Ice may also help prevent tissue damage. Use an ice pack, or put crushed ice in a plastic bag. Cover it with a towel and place it on joint for 15 to 20 minutes every hour or as directed. Heat treatment includes hot packs or heat lamps.
- **Physical activity** can help increase strength and flexibility. Be as active as possible while avoiding things that increase pain.

## When should seek immediate care?

- increased joint swelling, pain, or redness.
- sudden shortness of breath.
- Person is not able to control the urge to have a bowel movement or to urinate.

**Reference :** Micromedex online solution .2.0.