Rheumatoid arthritis

Also called: RA

A chronic inflammatory disorder affecting many joints, including those in the hands and feet.

**Common**

More than 200,000 US cases per year

- Treatment can help, but this condition can't be cured
- Requires a medical diagnosis
- Lab tests or imaging always required
- Chronic: can last for years or be lifelong

In rheumatoid arthritis, the body's immune system attacks its own tissue, including joints. In severe cases, it attacks internal organs.

Rheumatoid arthritis affects joint linings, causing painful swelling. Over long periods of time, the inflammation associated with rheumatoid arthritis can cause bone erosion and joint deformity.

While there’s no cure for rheumatoid arthritis, physiotherapy and medication can help slow the disease's progression. Most cases can be managed with a class of medications called anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)

**Ages affected**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-13</td>
<td>19%</td>
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<td>14-18</td>
<td>17%</td>
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<td>19-40</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>41-60</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>6%</td>
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**Symptoms**

**Requires a medical diagnosis**

Rheumatoid arthritis affects joint linings, causing painful swelling. Over long periods of time, the inflammation associated with rheumatoid arthritis can cause bone erosion and joint deformity.
People may experience:

**Pain areas:** in the joints, back, or muscles

**Joints:** stiffness, swelling, tenderness, or weakness

**Whole body:** fatigue, anemia, or malaise

**Skin:** lumps or redness

**Hand:** bump on the finger or swelling

**Also common:** flare, dry mouth, physical deformity, or sensation of pins and needles

### Treatments

**Treatment consists of immunosuppressants**

While there's no cure for rheumatoid arthritis, physiotherapy and medication can help slow the disease's progression. Most cases can be managed with a class of medications called anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)

### Self-care

- **Heating pad:** Soothes painful muscles or joints and can help drain skin infections.

### Medications

**Nonsteroidal anti-Inflammatory drug:** Relieves pain, decreases inflammation, and reduces fever.

- Celecoxib (Celebrex)
- Naproxen (Aleve, Naprosyn, Ec-Naprosyn, Midol (naproxen), and Mediproxen)
- Ketoprofen
- Indomethacin (Tivorbex)
- Aspirin (Bayer Aspirin, Ecotrin, Effervescent Antacid, E.C. Prin, and Bayer Advanced)

**Immunosuppressive drug:** Reduces immune response.

- Methotrexate (Trexall, Rasauro, Rheumatrex, and Otrexup (PF))
- Infliximab (Remicade)
- Golimumab (Simponi ARIA and Simponi)
- Tocilizumab (Actemra)
- Azathioprine (Azasan)
- Abatacept extract (Orencia and Orencia ClickJect)
- Etanercept (Enbrel and Enbrel SureClick)
- Adalimumab (Humira Pen and Humira)
- Anakinra (Kineret)
- Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil)
- Leflunomide (Arava)

**Anti-Inflammatory:** Prevents or counteracts swelling (inflammation) in joints and tissues.

- Sulfasalazine (Azulfidine, Sulfazine, and Azulfidine EN-tabs)

**Steroid:** Modifies or simulates hormone effects, often to reduce inflammation or for tissue growth and repair.

- Cortisone
• Prednisolone (Omnipred, Pediapred, Pred Mild, Veripred 20, and Pred Forte)
• Methylprednisolone (Medrol, Solu-Medrol, and Depo-Medrol)

Therapies

Stretching: Stretching exercises can improve flexibility and improve physical function.

Physical therapy: Restores muscle strength and function through exercise.

Medical procedure

Arthrocentesis: Using a syringe to collect fluid from around a joint. Also called joint aspiration.

Surgery

Arthroplasty: Surgery to repair or replace a joint.

Joint replacement: Removing a damaged or defective joint and inserting a new, functioning one in its place.

Specialists

Rheumatologist: Specializes in arthritis and other rheumatic diseases.

Geriatrician: Focuses on the health care of elderly people.

Primary care provider (PCP): Prevents, diagnoses, and treats diseases.

Consult a doctor for medical advice

Note: The information you see describes what usually happens with a medical condition, but doesn't apply to everyone. This information isn't medical advice, so make sure to contact a healthcare provider if you have a medical problem. If you think you may have a medical emergency, call your doctor or an emergency number immediately.

Sources: Mayo Clinic and others. Learn more