

1.5 million

Approximately 1.5 million people in the United States have RA, and there are a number of resources available to everyone!

# Get the Facts on Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis, also known as RA, is an example of an **autoimmune disease**. In autoimmune diseases, the immune system attacks healthy body tissues and cells, which causes inflammation (eg, pain, swelling, redness) and damage to the body (eg, muscles, joints, or bones). In RA, the immune system mistakenly attacks the lining of the joints.<sup>1</sup> The exact cause of RA is unknown; however, many genetic and environmental factors may be involved.<sup>2</sup>

## Signs and Symptoms of RA

Signs and symptoms of RA will vary for each person. They can also change over the course of the condition. Listed below are some common signs and symptoms individuals report:<sup>2,3</sup>



### TENDER OR WARM SWOLLEN JOINTS

Joint pain, soreness, and/or swelling can limit the mobility of RA patients<sup>2</sup>



### JOINT STIFFNESS

Often worst in the morning or after prolonged periods of inactivity<sup>2</sup>



### FATIGUE (FEELING TIRED)

Chronic fatigue is often associated with RA<sup>4</sup>



### WEIGHT LOSS

Losing weight, which may result from an inability to meet nutritional needs<sup>5</sup>



### FEVER

A fever, usually low grade, that may occur frequently or infrequently<sup>4</sup>



“What makes night within us may leave stars.”

Victor Hugo

## Rheumatoid Arthritis Flares

When symptoms come on suddenly, this may be referred to as a “flare.” Flares may be characterized by a single symptom or any group of symptoms.<sup>2</sup>

### What causes a flare?

RA flares may be triggered by environmental factors. These factors may include: stress, weather/temperature changes, overexertion, poor sleep, or infection.<sup>3,6</sup>

### What to do when a flare occurs:

When a flare occurs, the individual affected is encouraged to see their doctor to determine if any immediate steps must be taken.



**References:** 1. What is Rheumatoid Arthritis. Arthritis Foundation website. <https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/rheumatoid-arthritis/what-is-rheumatoid-arthritis.php>. Accessed September 28, 2018. 2. Rheumatoid Arthritis. Mayo Clinic website. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/symptoms-causes/syc-20353648>. Accessed March 15, 2019. 3. Watson S. Understanding RA Flares. Arthritis Foundation website. <https://www.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/pain-management/flare/ra-flare-up-severity.php>. Updated February, 2016. Accessed March 15, 2019. 4. Ezerioha M. How do you diagnose Rheumatoid Arthritis. Rheumatoid Arthritis Support Network website. <https://www.rheumatoidarthritis.org/ra/symptoms/>. Published October, 2018. Accessed March 13, 2019. 5. Koch C. Nutrition & Rheumatoid Arthritis. Johns Hopkins website. <https://www.hopkinsarthritis.org/patient-corner/disease-management/rheumatoid-arthritis-nutrition/>. Published May, 2015. Accessed March 13, 2019. 6. Weather and Arthritis. Arthritis Foundation website. <https://www.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/tools-resources/weather/>. Accessed March 15, 2019.



## Treating RA and RA Flares

There is no cure for rheumatoid arthritis, but certain treatments may reduce symptoms and prevent permanent damage to the body.

Treatment for RA is different for every person. Individuals should talk to their doctor to determine which treatment(s) may be right for them!

Different treatments for RA may include:<sup>7,8</sup>

- ◆ Medications
- ◆ Physical therapy
- ◆ Lifestyle changes
- ◆ Chiropractic treatment
- ◆ Surgery

The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying away small stones.  
*Confucius*



## Goals of Rheumatoid Arthritis Treatment

It is important to understand the goals of your individualized RA treatment plan. Identifying and keeping track of treatment goals is a key first step. Individuals should discuss their treatment goals with their doctor. Some RA treatment goals may include:<sup>9</sup>

- Reducing inflammation
- Preventing further or permanent damage
- Managing symptoms

## Self-Care and RA

Coping with RA can be overwhelming at times. Sometimes it can make the individual feel sad, angry, or isolated. Practicing proper self-care can help and is important for both your mental and physical well-being. Some ideas for self-care may include:<sup>10</sup>

- ◆ Staying connected with friends/family
- ◆ Engaging in activities you enjoy
- ◆ Seeking humorous and upbeat entertainment
- ◆ Setting aside leisure time (eg, reading a book, going to the spa, listening to a podcast)
- ◆ Investing in a hobby
- ◆ Seeking quiet through meditation and/or prayer
- ◆ Eating healthy meals
- ◆ Working with your healthcare provider to develop an exercise program that's right for you

## More Information, Support, and Educational Resources

This list includes helpful websites and organizations that provide information about rheumatoid arthritis, support groups, and other RA resources!

- ◆ **Arthritis Foundation**  
[www.arthritis.org](http://www.arthritis.org)
- ◆ **American College of Rheumatology**  
[www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver](http://www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver)
- ◆ **CDC Website-Rheumatoid Arthritis Information**  
[www.cdc.gov/arthritis/basics/rheumatoid-arthritis.html](http://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/basics/rheumatoid-arthritis.html)



**References:** 7. Rheumatoid Arthritis. Mayo Clinic website. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20353653>. Accessed March 15, 2019. 8. Sayre C. How chiropractors can help arthritis pain. Arthritis Foundation website. <https://www.arthritis.org/living-with-arthritis/treatments/natural/other-therapies/chiropractic-medicine.php>. Accessed March 15, 2019. 9. Rheumatoid Arthritis Treatment. Arthritis Foundation website. <https://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/rheumatoid-arthritis/treatment.php>. Accessed March 15, 2019. 10. Self-Care for Autoimmune Disease Patients. American Autoimmune website. <https://www.aarda.org/self-care/>. Published September, 2018. Accessed March 15, 2019.

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