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Living With Rheumatoid Arthritis

YOU CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT.

In the United States about 2.1 million people have **rheumatoid arthritis** (ROO-ma-toyd ar-THRY-tis), or RA. Anyone can get RA. Many people who have RA live happy, healthy lives. This guide will help you learn more about RA.

WHAT IS RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS?

RA is a common form of arthritis. RA causes swelling in the joints like your hands, wrists, elbows and feet. This swelling causes warmth and pain in the joint. RA also can affect your bones and organs like your skin, eyes, heart and lungs.

RA usually affects the same joints on both sides of the body. So, if your left elbow is swollen, your right elbow probably is swollen, too.

HOW DO YOU KNOW IF YOU HAVE RA?

RA feels different for different people.

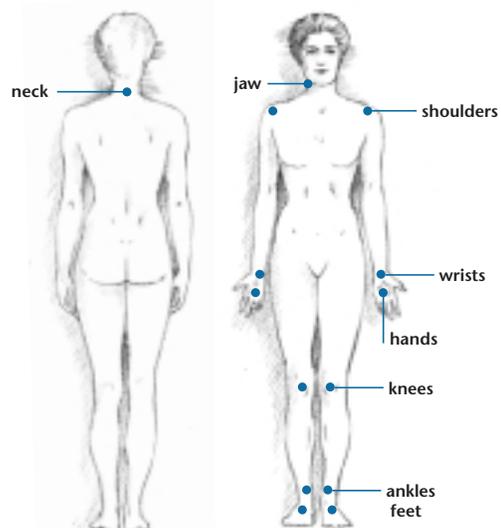
If you have RA, the skin around your joints may be red, and your joints may feel:

- Warm
- Swollen
- Painful
- Difficult to move

RA also may cause you to feel sick all over. You may:

- Lose your appetite
- Run a slight fever
- Have little energy

People with RA also may develop **rheumatoid nodules** (ROO-ma-toid NAJ-ools). These are lumps that form under the skin, over bony areas like elbows, feet or the spine.



Joints that may be affected by RA.

WHAT CAUSES RA?

Doctors do not know what causes RA. They do know that the body's **immune** (im-MYOON) **system** has a part in the swelling and joint damage that occurs in RA. The immune system is the body's defense against illness. In RA, the immune system is overactive, and produces swelling in joints.

HOW DOES MY DOCTOR KNOW IF I HAVE RA?

To figure out if you have RA, your doctor will need:

- Your medical history
- A physical check-up
- Blood tests
- X-rays

HOW IS RA TREATED?

There is no cure for RA. But there are medicines and therapies that can help with the pain and swelling. Getting help early is very important.

You may meet with different health care workers to help you manage your RA. A rheumatologist (roo-ma-TALL-o-jist) should be the leader of your health care team. A rheumatologist is a doctor with special training in arthritis.

Your health care team will suggest a number of things you can do to feel better, like taking medicine, getting plenty of rest, and staying fit by doing exercises. They can help treat other problems and illnesses you may have because of your RA.

WHAT MEDICINE SHOULD I TAKE?

Your doctor may give you medicine to treat your RA. You also may find other medicines at your local grocery store or pharmacy that say they treat arthritis. Be sure to talk to your doctor before taking these kinds of medicines. They may not work with your type of arthritis or with the other medicines you take.

MEDICINES AND THERAPIES CAN:

- Relieve pain
- Reduce swelling
- Stop or slow joint damage
- Improve what you can do and how you feel

Remember:

- You can feel better.
- Talk to your doctor.
- Learn more about rheumatoid arthritis
- Follow your treatment.

For more information: The Arthritis Foundation offers a wide variety of books, brochures and videos about different forms of arthritis, treatment and self-management techniques to help you take control of your arthritis. To order any of these products, become an Arthritis Foundation member or to subscribe to the Arthritis Foundation's award-winning consumer health magazine, *Arthritis Today*, call (800) 283-7800. Call or visit our Web site (www.arthritis.org) to find out how you can take control of your arthritis and start living better today!

This brochure has been reviewed by the
AMERICAN COLLEGE OF RHEUMATOLOGY.



MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of the Arthritis Foundation is to improve lives through leadership in the prevention, control and cure of arthritis and related diseases.



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