

FAST FACTS: Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is a long-term autoimmune disease (a disease in which the body produces antibodies that attack its own tissues) causing inflammation of joints and surrounding tissues. It also affects other organs. RA occurs at any age and women are more likely to develop RA than men. RA usually affects both sides of the body and most frequently affects the wrists, fingers, knees, feet, and ankles. RA is a progressive disease with the potential to seriously impact function. RA that begins later in life is usually less severe. The beginning of RA is subtle and may follow symptoms such as general discomfort, weight loss, and vague joint pain or stiffness.

✓ What Medical Professionals Assess

- Characteristics of the pain such as when it started, the location of the pain, the effect of position change, etc.
- Morning stiffness lasting longer than 30 minutes then subsiding during the day
- Level of stiffness which recurs after periods of daytime inactivity
- Joint warmth, tenderness, and pain
- Degree of stress such as from infection, surgery, emotional trauma because acute onset is less common but may be caused by stress

✓ Possible Interventions

- Medications
 - Acetaminophen
 - NSAIDS, such as Advil
 - Other medications such as corticosteroids, antirheumatics, and biologic agents
- Non-Drug Treatments
 - Regular [exercise](#) is one of the MOST effective pain reducers
 - Physical & occupational therapy (i.e. range of motion, splints, orthotic devices)
 - Heat/cold application
 - Life style changes such as stress reduction and healthy diet
 - Complementary therapies such as meditation, yoga, acupuncture, [massage](#), etc.

✓ **What Caregivers can do to help their loved one with RA**

- Write down and share information about your loved one's pain with their provider
- Consider using a [Pain Diary](#) to note important information useful to the provider
- Encourage your loved one to try a non-drug treatment to decrease pain

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