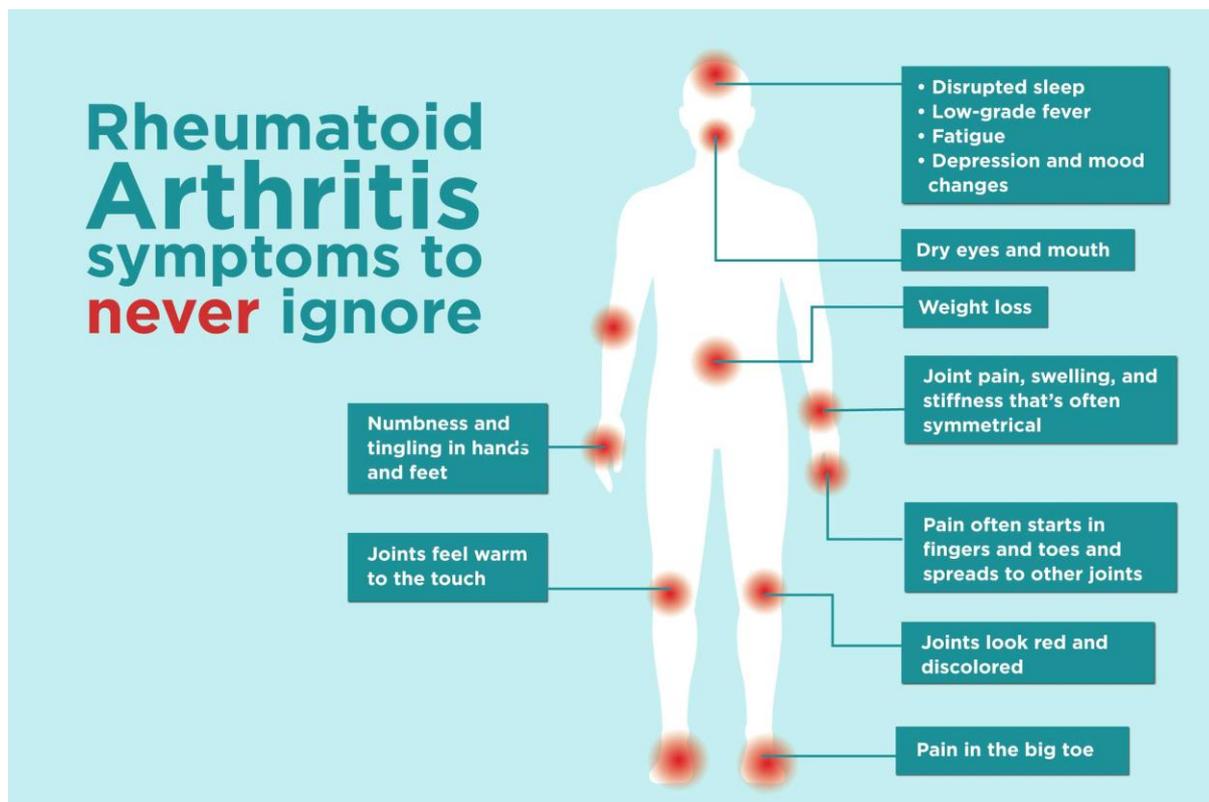


Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)



What is Rheumatoid Arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a **long-term autoimmune condition**. This means the body's immune system mistakenly attacks the lining of the joints, causing inflammation.

RA commonly affects the **hands, wrists, feet, and knees**, and usually involves joints on **both sides of the body**.

What Causes Rheumatoid Arthritis?

The exact cause is not known. Factors that may increase risk include:

- Family history
- Autoimmune conditions
- Smoking
- Hormonal factors

RA is **not caused by wear and tear** and is different from osteoarthritis.

Common Symptoms

Symptoms can vary between people and may flare up and settle down.

- Joint pain, swelling, and warmth
- Morning stiffness lasting more than 30–60 minutes
- Fatigue and low energy
- Reduced grip strength
- Difficulty with daily activities

Some people may also experience symptoms outside the joints, such as dry eyes or nodules.

How is Rheumatoid Arthritis Diagnosed?

Diagnosis is based on:

- Your symptoms and medical history
- Blood tests (to look for inflammation and antibodies)
- X-rays, ultrasound, or MRI scans

Early diagnosis is important to prevent joint damage.

How is Rheumatoid Arthritis Treated?

There is **no cure**, but treatment is very effective at controlling symptoms and preventing joint damage.

Medication

You may be prescribed:

- Disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs)
- Biologic medications
- Anti-inflammatory medicines or steroids (short-term)

Medication is usually managed by a rheumatology specialist.

Role of Physiotherapy

Physiotherapy plays an important role in managing RA by helping to:

- Maintain joint movement and flexibility
- Improve muscle strength
- Reduce pain and stiffness
- Improve posture and function

Your physiotherapist will tailor exercises to your condition and flare status.

Exercise and Activity

Regular, gentle exercise is recommended:

- Range-of-motion exercises
- Strengthening exercises
- Walking, swimming, or cycling

During flare-ups, activity may need to be reduced temporarily.

Self-Management Tips

- Pace activities and take regular breaks
 - Use heat or cold packs for symptom relief
 - Maintain a healthy weight
 - Stop smoking
 - Protect your joints by avoiding excessive strain
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Flare-Ups

A flare-up is a period when symptoms worsen.

Signs of a flare-up include:

- Increased joint pain and swelling
- Increased stiffness and fatigue

During flare-ups:

- Reduce activity levels
 - Continue gentle movement
 - Contact your healthcare team if symptoms persist
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When to Seek Medical Advice

Contact your GP or rheumatology team if:

- Symptoms are worsening or not controlled
 - You experience side effects from medication
 - You develop signs of infection
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Key Points to Remember

- Rheumatoid arthritis is a long-term inflammatory condition
 - Early treatment is crucial
 - Medication and physiotherapy work together
 - Staying active helps protect your joints
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