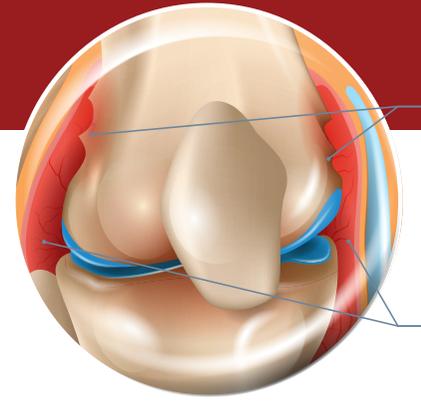




Rheumatoid Arthritis

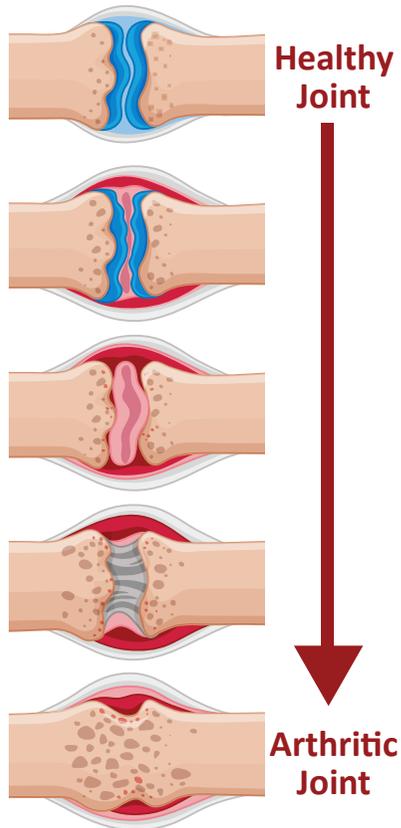


What is it?

Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic inflammation of the joints in hands and feet. It affects the lining of the joints, causing pain and swelling that can result in bone weakening and joint changes. It may also affect other organs in the body, eg. skin, lungs and kidneys.

Causes?

The exact cause is unknown, but rheumatoid arthritis is classified as an auto-immune disease, where the body attacks its own system.



Signs and symptoms



Morning stiffness that may last for hours



Firm bumps of tissue under the skin on the arms (rheumatoid nodules)



Fever



Fatigue



Tender, warm, swollen joints

Risk factors



Gender – women are more at risk than men



Family history



Age – more commonly between ages 40 and 60



Smoking

Diagnosis



Physical examination



Blood test

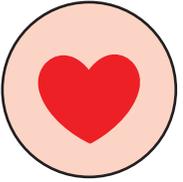


Complications

Treatment



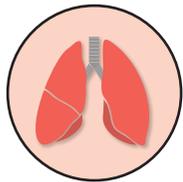
Osteoporosis – a condition that weakens the bones and make them more prone to fracture.



Heart problems – increased risk for hardened and blocked arteries.



Carpal tunnel syndrome – the inflammation in the wrist can compress the nerve.



Lung problems – risk of inflammation and scarring of lung tissues that can lead to shortness of breath.

- **NSAIDs.** Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication to relieve pain and reduce inflammation.
- **Steroids.** Cortisone can reduce inflammation and pain. Side effects may include thinning of bones, cataracts, weight gain and diabetes. Doctors often prescribe a corticosteroid to relieve acute symptoms, with the goal of gradually tapering off the medication.
- **Disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs).** These drugs can slow the progression of rheumatoid arthritis and save the joints and other tissues from permanent damage. Side effects vary, but may include liver damage, bone marrow suppression and lung infections.
- **Immunosuppressants.** These medications act to tame your immune system, which is out of control in rheumatoid arthritis.

THERAPY

- Occupational therapy, physiotherapy and exercises for the relief of symptoms.
- Assistive devices can help avoid stressing your painful joints.

SURGERY

If medication fails to slow or prevent joint damage, the treating doctor can suggest surgery:

- Total joint replacement
- Tendon repair
- Joint fusion (to stabilise) or joint realignment for pain relief when a joint replacement isn't an option.

There is no cure for rheumatoid arthritis. Medication can reduce the inflammation in the joints to relieve pain and prevent or slow joint damage.

TREATMENT

Apply heat or cold – Heat can help ease the pain and relax tense, painful muscles. Cold may dull the sensation of pain.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Relax – Find ways to cope with pain by reducing stress.

Exercise regularly – Gentle exercise can help strengthen the muscles around the joints. It can help fight the fatigue. Walking, swimming or water aerobics. Avoid exercising the tender, injured or severely inflamed joints.