

## RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS: BASIC STEPS TO RELIEVE IT



Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease of the joints. Immune cells attack and eventually destroy otherwise healthy synovial tissues that surround our joints and similar lining tissues of some organs. Synovial tissues are those that lie between the joints and help to lubricate joint movement.

Patients who suffer from Moderate to Severe Rheumatoid Arthritis (sometimes also referred to as Progressive RA or Aggressive RA) experience chronic inflammation. Many, and in some cases, all joints become painfully stiff, weakened, or swollen. In Mild RA, fewer joints, such as the hand or foot joints, are usually affected.

RA differs from joint damage that is caused from normal wear and tear and regular arthritis (commonly called osteoarthritis). In rheumatoid arthritis, the condition affects the lining of the joints, causing a painful swelling that can potentially result in bone erosion and joint deformity.

### TREATMENT

While there is no cure for RA, some treatments can improve symptoms and slow the progress of the disease. These treatments have the best results when started early and aggressively, so it is important to talk with your physician as soon as possible if you exhibit any arthritic symptoms, such as fatigue, loss of energy, lack of appetite, low-grade fever, muscle and joint aches, and stiffness. Muscle and joint stiffness associated with RA are usually most noticeable in the morning and after periods of inactivity.

The goal of treatment is to minimize symptoms such as pain and swelling, to prevent bone deformity, and to maintain basic daily joint function. There are medications to either ease the symptoms or slow or stop the progression of the disease to minimize joint damage.

Regular exercise is strongly recommended as both safe and useful to maintain muscle strength and overall physical function in RA patients. Often, occupational therapy can supplement an exercise program designed specifically for those with RA. It is best to consult with your treating physician if you are experiencing any symptoms before starting a treatment program.

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