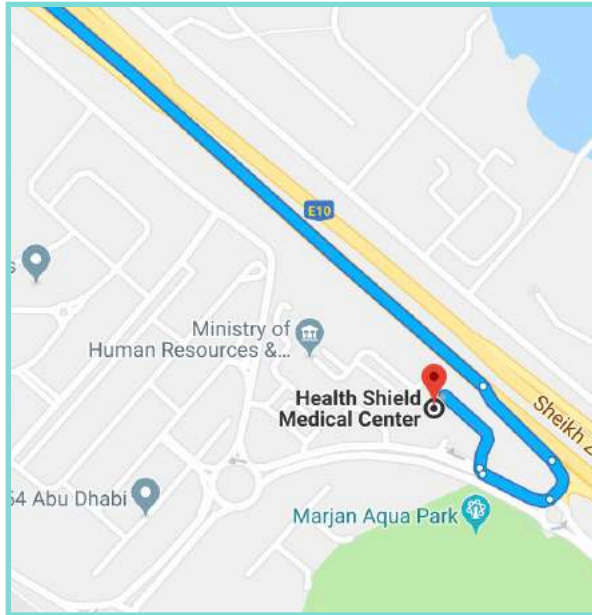


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# RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

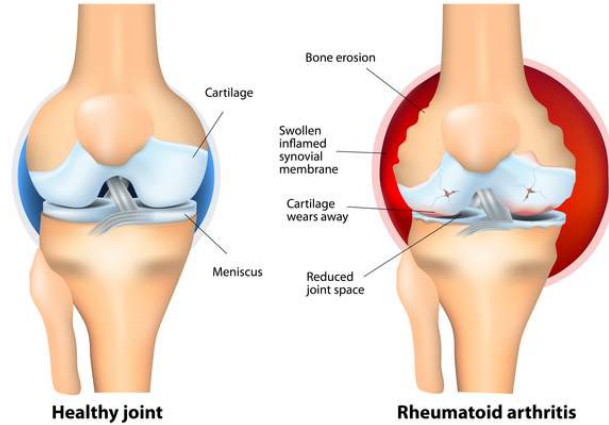


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Rheumatoid Arthritis is an illness that causes painful inflamed joints. It usually starts between the ages of 22 and 55 years and is 3 times more common in women than men.

## What is Rheumatoid Arthritis?



Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease that causes pain and swelling of the joints. The normal role of your body's immune system is to fight off infections to keep you healthy. In an autoimmune disease, your immune system starts attacking your own healthy tissues. In RA, the immune system targets the lining of the joints, causing inflammation and joint damage. RA usually affects smaller joints, such as the joints in the hands and feet. However larger joints such as the hips and knees can also be affected.

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of RA vary from person to person.

The most common symptoms are:

- Joint pain, swelling, and tenderness to touch
- stiffness in the joints, especially in the morning
- symmetrical (the same joints on both sides of the body are affected)
- Fatigue
- Fever
- Leg ulcers
- Shortness of breath
- Skin nodules
- Numbness/tingling

## How is it diagnosed?

- Blood tests for inflammation
- Blood tests for antibodies (proteins made by the body's immune system). Testing for anti-cyclic citrullinated peptide (anti-CCP) and rheumatoid factor can help diagnose RA, although not all people with RA will test positive for these antibodies.
- X-rays to see if your joints are being damaged by the disease. X-ray changes are rare in the early stages of RA.

It can be difficult, and often takes time, to diagnose RA as the symptoms can be similar to other types of arthritis. If your doctor suspects you have RA you should be referred to a rheumatologist, a doctor who specializes in arthritis.



## What treatments are there for RA?

- Your doctor will give you medicine to stop the pain and swelling. You should be seen by a rheumatologist who will confirm the diagnosis and recommend a group of drugs known as disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs). These drugs can improve your arthritis and decrease the progression of the disease. Early use of DMARDs is recommended to suppress disease activity. These medications may need 6-24 weeks to get their positive effect.
- Sometimes steroids are used to treat rheumatoid arthritis. Steroids are powerful medicines that can reduce joint inflammation. Steroids are taken by mouth or injected into a joint. Because steroids can cause weak bones if they are used for a long time, a second medicine may be given to help your bones stay strong.

- Bed rest is also used to treat rheumatoid arthritis.
- Your doctor may order physical therapy and special exercises that can help your symptoms.
- Splints are sometimes used to protect the joint.
- Hot soaks, heat lamps heating pads, or whirlpool treatments can also help your symptoms
- Sometimes surgery is needed to fix the joint

## DO

- Tell your doctor about other medical problems you have, especially if you have a kidney or stomach problems.
- Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or plan to get pregnant, because some medications should be stopped at least 3 months before pregnancy.
- Take steroids with your food.
- Ask your doctor how to keep your bones strong.
- Have your blood pressure checked and blood tested for diabetes while taking steroids.
- Sleep 10 to 12 hours daily.
- Exercise; ask your doctor what kind of exercise is best suited for you.
- Take several daily rest periods.
- Lose weight if you need to.
- Talk to someone about the stress of having arthritis.
- Call your doctor right away or go to the emergency room if you have fever with a red and warm joint.
- Get regular blood tests to check the disease status and any complications that might arise from the medications used.

## DON'T

- Don't stop taking your medicine or change your dosage because you feel better unless your doctor says to do so.
- Don't let yourself get exhausted, because this can make your symptoms worse.
- Don't drink alcohol while being treated.



## Recovery Time:

Rheumatoid Arthritis symptoms tend to come and go, but they can be treated with medicine. Your treatment time depends on the severity of your symptoms.

## What Can I Do?

People suffering from Rheumatoid Arthritis can still have an active and normal lifestyle, provided they:

Get treatment throughout their life

Live a healthy life

Learn ways to manage pain

Learn how to protect your joints and cope with tiredness.