

Facts - Rheumatoid Arthritis

May is National Arthritis Month

Basic Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) Facts¹

- > 2 million Americans suffer from RA
- 1% of the American population has RA
- Peak onset is between 20-45 years of age
- 75% of people with RA are women

Early Diagnosis

- Very early treatment of RA results in better outcomes
- Joint damage happens early in RA
- Rheumatologists can make an accurate RA diagnosis quickly² with blood tests, joint x-rays showing damage or bone thinning, or MRI or ultrasound study that can show early joint damage that is invisible on x-ray

Warning Signs

- Persistent joint pain for more than a week
- Morning stiffness in joints lasting longer than ½ hour
- Pain or tenderness when squeezing hand or moving foot joints
- Swelling, warmth or redness in hand or foot joints
- Persistent limitation of motion in more than one joint
- Joint pains combined with fatigue, fever or weight loss

Treatment of RA

- RA patients receive better care when treated by a rheumatologist and a primary care physician²
- For better long-term results, treatment of RA needs to address joint damage prevention in addition to pain relief
- Physical therapy and various anti-inflammatory medications; however, patients with RA are nearly twice as likely as patients with osteoarthritis to have serious complications from NSAIDs¹

- Oral medications like methotrexate that can stop joint damage or combinations of methotrexate with newer biologic therapies designed to be very specific for some of the inflammatory chemicals, called cytokines, which cause the damage and pain in RA

What a Patient Can Do

- Speak with your doctor about the best and safest medications for you
- Let your doctor know if you are having problems with any of your medications
- Keep your joints moving – stretch and exercise – under the guidance of your doctor or physical therapist. With rheumatoid arthritis, it's important to have a balanced approach
- Perform exercises to maintain strength, flexibility and function, but allow your body to rest during flare-ups
- Keep to a healthy weight. It's easier on your joints. Even the loss of 10 pounds can make a significant difference

About the Gosden-Robinson Early Arthritis Center (EAC) at HSS

- Connects patients quickly and efficiently with a rheumatologist for evaluation and treatment
- Applies latest research findings to patient care to help patients remain fully active without pain
- Treatments may include medication for inflammation, medication to prevent joint damage, referrals for exercise and physical therapy and/or advice about nutrition and supplements
- Patients have the opportunity to learn about rheumatology research that could potentially improve their care

Contact the Gosden-Robinson Early Arthritis Center

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¹ American College of Rheumatology. Arthritis Rheum. 2002;46: 328-346.

² Van der Horst-Bruinsma IE, Speyer I, Visser, H, et al...Br J Rheumatol. 1998;37: 1084-1088.