Do you or does someone close to you have Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)?

What is RA?
RA is a chronic, systemic illness. It affects the whole body, especially the joints. RA is also an autoimmune disease, which means that the immune system in the body, usually responsible for fighting off infections, instead begins to attack cells. RA affects just over 1 million people in the United States; about 70% are women. Most people are between 30 and 50 when they are diagnosed with RA, but one can develop it at any age. The exact cause of RA is unknown. Research indicates that many factors may play a part.

What are the symptoms?
RA can affect different people in different ways. Certain symptoms, however, are very common:

► pain in the joints for more than a week
► morning stiffness lasting more than 1/2 hour
► pain or tenderness when squeezing a hand or foot
► limited motion in the joints
► fatigue
► fever and weight loss

Even if you are not experiencing all of these symptoms, joint damage may still be occurring. For this reason, early diagnosis and treatment are important.

How is RA treated?
Now more than ever before, there are good treatment options available for RA. Early treatment with newer medications may halt the progression of the illness, as well as treat the symptoms. A rheumatologist is a doctor who treats illnesses like RA. He or she can work together with you to decide on the best treatment plan.

The impact of RA:
Managing a chronic illness like RA can be challenging physically and emotionally. Often people may feel anxious and overwhelmed by the unpredictable course of the disease, various treatment options and their side effects. You may wonder how RA may affect you, your family, and your overall well-being.
How we can help

HSS offers two free support and education programs for people with RA. Both groups offer unique opportunities for learning more about this illness, from both medical professionals, and from peers with the same diagnosis. These programs were developed to provide a welcoming forum where people with RA can share concerns, and can also have access to:

► Reliable, easy-to-understand illness-related information from healthcare providers

► Coping strategies and emotional support from peers who understand

Living with RA: Lecture, Lunch and Conversation

…is a free monthly support and education program for people with severe RA and their family members and friends. Lectures by experts in RA treatment are followed by discussion facilitated by the social work coordinator and rheumatology nurse.

Contact:
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www.hss.edu/RAGroup
The Early RA Support and Education Program

...was developed specially for people recently diagnosed with RA and Early RA. Participants meet for a free, 4 session series which presents essential information about RA and RA treatment. Following each lecture, discussion with others also coping with a new RA diagnosis is facilitated by the social work coordinator and a rheumatology nurse.

Contact: Joan Westreich, LCSW
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Additional Support

In addition to our support programs, other resources are available. We can help with:

► Information on RA treatment and coping with RA in English and Spanish
► Assistance with benefits and referrals to government, community entitlement programs, insurance and other support services
► Short-term, one-on-one counseling

What people have said about the Hospital for Special Surgery RA Support and Education Programs

Since 1999, Hospital for Special Surgery has provided support and education programs for people with RA and their loved ones. These programs are the only ones of their kind in the tri-state area and beyond.

Members have shared:
“This has been a terrific learning experience...I feel less overwhelmed and more optimistic about coping.”

“This is fantastic and so helpful to my spiritual health as well. Connecting with others who have the same issues makes me feel better.”

“Well informed speakers; the wonderful experience of feeling supported and valued by [the] group members.”

“My feeling/attitude toward RA has changed from uneasy acceptance to a much more positive viewpoint – thanks to the new information and to the shared thoughts from the great folks in the group.”
These programs are a collaboration of the Department of Social Work Programs, the Early Arthritis Initiatives of the Inflammatory Arthritis Center and the Division of Nursing.

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