

Rheumatoid Arthritis

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Category : Rheumatology

About five years ago when we were in Delhi, I remember having terrible pain off and on in my joints including elbows, fingers, and knees; and I was even not able to sleep through the night. The most troublesome of all the joints were my fingers which had got swollen by then, and I had problems in even holding on to anything. Some days I was fine, but some days I was having horrible pain in most of my joints. I even had difficulty in walking and climbing up and down the stairs. Then I consulted a specialist, Dr. Sanjay Nirjhar, who advised me to take complete bed rest on my bad days when I have terrible pain. I took painkillers too, but as I know for sure that those might affect my kidneys, I was not very regular with them. But still, I needed a painkiller everytime I was about to go out. Dr. Sanjay Nirjhar performed a battery of tests on me including RA/rheumatoid factor, synovial fluid testing, thyroid test, vitamin B level, and calcium, and the test results showed my RA factor to be extremely elevated in 50-60 range against the normal range of around 20, and he came to the conclusion that I had rheumatoid arthritis.

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Later, I took a second opinion from Dr. Balakrishnan at Hinduja Hospital who probed deeply into my family history, and yes indeed, to his doubt, I have an aunt on my father's side with this severe illness affecting her joints. She is completely bedridden and unable to walk any distance. Dr. Balakrishnan also advised me to stay active as much as possible, as otherwise, the chances of me becoming immobile were very high. It is very depressing to have such pains, and I do not want to be immobile like my aunt. Dr. Balakrishnan also prescribed me Folitrax, Shelcal-CT for calcium, calcirol sachet, methotrexate 20 mg weekly, and particularly the steroid injection of Depo-Medrol

that I was getting every six months used to provide me with immediate relief. I also tried herbal massage with certain ayurvedic oils which helped me tremendously and some Rhumasyl oil. I took the help from a physiotherapist who used to work with my joints and made me do some joint exercises at that time.

This condition had severely impacted my activities of daily living to the extent that I had to give up my passion for teaching as it involved too much standing, and most of the time you need to be up on your toes. I am really appreciative of my family's support in dealing with this condition who were always cautious and careful that I am getting enough rest to avoid worsening of symptoms. I was always helped by my daughter most of the time while I change from sit-to-stand position, and she even let me enjoy the latest movies as I cannot stand on my own and walk at all after 2-3 hours of sitting. Even my driver helps me moving in and out of the car. Often times, due to extreme pain, I had to abandon the thought of going to any get-togethers or parties. My social life is almost finished and needless to mention, with such severe pain, nobody can lead a happy and contented life.

I would like to advice the fellow patients that they should regularly get exposure to sun light during the daytime to get enough vitamin D production inside the body. It is very important for having healthy bones. If in case your vitamin D level is low, then you must have additional dietary supplements to compensate the deficiency. Also, you cannot afford to put on weight, as excessive weight anyways is never advisable. Some of my family and friends even advised me not to take any cold things, and in fact someone suggested taking garlic regularly.

Some Do's and Don'ts That I Follow Diligently to Cope with My Condition

Getting regular checkups from my rheumatologist and religiously taking any medicines that are prescribed by him

Keeping my weight under check

Regular exercising

Not taking regular massages, and light massage only for my joint health

Following a normal healthy diet

Keeping myself active as much as possible

Doing finger movements with the help of a squeeze ball

Keeping a positive spirit

Website Doctor's Advice

What to do in case of severe symptoms?

Take only the medicines prescribed to you by your doctor, and get in touch with him/her immediately.

Don't panic and stay calm

Important questions to ask from your specialist:-

What is rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and what are its alarming symptoms?

How can it be treated?

Will it affect my other body parts as well?

Would I be able to function properly?

What are the recommendations for me?

Do I need to take medicines long-term? If yes, how long and what are their side effects?

Lifestyle changes - do's and don'ts

Do's

Change your position frequently

Change your hand's position, and stretch your legs frequently while doing prolonged activities

Do take proper care of your joints

Do proper range of motion exercises after consulting your doctor

Take adequate rest in between your daily chores

Consider using an assistive device like cane; don't feel shy of using it

Don'ts

Don't stress your joints or it will pain

Don't lift heavy weights

Avoid smoking

Keep your weight under control

Avoid overuse of painkillers

The kind of support that you need from your family:-

The family needs to be very supportive and must create a friendly and safe environment for the patient.