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Rheumatoid Arthritis

Also called: RA

What is rheumatoid arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a form of arthritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/arthritis.html>] that causes pain, swelling, and stiffness in your joints. RA is an autoimmune disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/autoimmunediseases.html>] . Although it is most common in the wrist and fingers, this disease can cause your immune system to attack any joint tissue. The inflammation (swelling) that comes with RA can also affect other body parts. Inflammation could cause medical issues in your eyes, skin, heart, nerves, blood, or lungs.

RA differs from osteoarthritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/osteoarthritis.html>] , a common arthritis that often comes with age. RA affects the lining of your joints and damages the tissue that covers the ends of the bones in a joint. Eventually, this might cause your joints to not work as well.

There is no cure for RA, but early treatment can help you manage symptoms, reduce joint damage, and lead a productive life.

Who is more likely to get rheumatoid arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis can happen at any age, but your risk increases as you become an **older adult**. Your chance of developing RA can also increase if:

- **You're a woman.** Women are more likely to get RA than men.
- **You have a family history.** If a member of your family has RA, you're more likely to get the disease.
- **You're a smoker.** Smoking [<https://medlineplus.gov/smoking.html>] over a long period of time increases your risk of getting RA and how serious the disease can be.
- **You have other medical conditions that may increase your risk of getting RA.** These include obesity [<https://medlineplus.gov/obesity.html>] , gum disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/gumdisease.html>] , and lung disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/lungdiseases.html>] .

What causes rheumatoid arthritis?

No one knows what causes rheumatoid arthritis. A few things that might play a part in getting RA include:

- Your **genes** are parts of DNA in your cells that are passed down from your parents. Certain genes may increase your risk of getting rheumatoid arthritis, but not everyone with these genes gets RA.
- The **environment**, which includes things such as cigarette smoke, sometimes triggers RA symptoms.
- **Hormones** are chemical messengers in your bloodstream that control the actions of certain cells or organs. Researchers think that sex hormones might play a role in getting RA. Women are more likely to develop the disease, and RA symptoms may change during and after pregnancy.

What are the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis?

Your immune system may start turning against your body's joints and tissues years before you notice any symptoms of RA. The changes from this type of immune malfunction usually settle in your joints.

RA affects people differently. You might have the disease for only a short time, or your symptoms might come and go. The severe form can be chronic (long-lasting) and may last a lifetime.

Symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis may include:

- Joint pain or stiffness when moving. This is usually worse in the morning or after inactivity. RA usually affects both joints. If one of your hands or knees is affected, so is the other.
- Joint tenderness, redness, and warmth.
- Joint swelling may make daily activities hard. These could include things such as combing your hair, buttoning your clothes, or bending your knees.
- Fatigue [<https://medlineplus.gov/fatigue.html>] , fever [<https://medlineplus.gov/fever.html>] , and a loss of appetite.
- Hard bumps (rheumatoid nodules) under your skin near the joints.

How is rheumatoid arthritis diagnosed?

There's no single test for rheumatoid arthritis. The disease develops over time. At first, you may only have a few symptoms, making it hard to diagnose RA in its early stages. To find out if you have RA, your health care provider may:

- **Ask about your medical history**, including your symptoms.
- **Ask about your family health history**, including relatives who have had RA.
- **Do a physical exam**, which includes checking your joints, looking for rashes or nodules, and listening to your chest for signs of inflammation in your lungs.
- **Order blood tests or imaging studies** [<https://medlineplus.gov/diagnosticimaging.html>] (x-ray or ultrasound) to make sure other health conditions aren't causing your symptoms since they may be like other types of arthritis and joint conditions.

Your provider may refer you to a rheumatologist (a doctor who specializes in arthritis care) for tests, diagnosis, and care.

What are the treatments for rheumatoid arthritis?

There is no cure for RA, but early treatment can help prevent your symptoms from getting worse and damaging your joints. Treatment can include medicine, lifestyle changes, and surgery. These may slow or stop joint damage and reduce pain and swelling.

Your provider may use a combination of treatments. Your treatment may change based on your symptoms.

You can help manage your RA symptoms if you:

- Are physically active [<https://medlineplus.gov/howmuchexercisedoineed.html>]
- Keep a healthy weight [<https://medlineplus.gov/weightcontrol.html>]
- Avoid injuries to your joints
- Avoid activities that have repetitive motions, like bending your knee over and over
- Stop smoking [<https://medlineplus.gov/quittingsmoking.html>] , or don't start

NIH: National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

Start Here

- Rheumatoid Arthritis [<https://familydoctor.org/condition/rheumatoid-arthritis/?adfree=true>] (American Academy of Family Physicians)
Also in Spanish [<https://es.familydoctor.org/condicion/arthritis-reumatoide-es/?adfree=true>]
- Rheumatoid Arthritis [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/health-topics/rheumatoid-arthritis>]
 (National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/es/informacion-de-salud/arthritis-reumatoide>]
- Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) [<https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/rheumatoid-arthritis/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Diagnosis and Tests

- ANA (Antinuclear Antibody) Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/ana-antinuclear-antibody-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-anticuerpos-antinucleares/>]
- C-Reactive Protein (CRP) Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/c-reactive-protein-crp-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-proteina-c-reactiva-pcr/>]
- CCP Antibody Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/ccp-antibody-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-anticuerpos-antipeptido-ciclico-citrulinado-anti-ccp/>]
- Complement Blood Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/complement-blood-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/analisis-del-complemento/>]
- Erythrocyte Sedimentation Rate (ESR) [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/erythrocyte-sedimentation-rate-esr/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/tasa-de-sedimentacion-eritrocitica/>]
- Rheumatoid Factor (RF) Test [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/rheumatoid-factor-rf-test/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/prueba-de-factor-reumatoideo-fr/>]
- Synovial Fluid Analysis [<https://medlineplus.gov/lab-tests/synovial-fluid-analysis/>]  (National Library of Medicine)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/pruebas-de-laboratorio/analisis-del-liquido-sinovial/>]

Treatments and Therapies

- Joint Injections (Joint Aspirations) [<https://rheumatology.org/patients/joint-injections-joint-aspirations>] (American College of Rheumatology)
Also in Spanish [<https://rheumatology.org/patients/inyecciones-aspiraciones-articulares>]
- Rheumatoid Arthritis: In Depth [<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/rheumatoid-arthritis-in-depth>]  (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health)

Living With

- 6 Tips to Manage Rheumatoid Arthritis Symptoms [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/in-depth/6-tips-to-manage-rheumatoid-arthritis-symptoms/art-20486824?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
- About Physical Activity and Arthritis [<https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/prevention/>] (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

Related Issues

- Immune System & Rheumatic Disease [<https://rheumatology.org/immune-system-rheumatic-disease>] (American College of Rheumatology)
Also in Spanish [<https://rheumatology.org/el-sistema-inmunologico-y-la-enfermedad-reumatica>]
- Rheumatoid Arthritis: Can It Affect the Eyes? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/expert-answers/rheumatoid-arthritis/FAQ-20057897?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/expert-answers/rheumatoid-arthritis/faq-20057897?p=1>]
- Rheumatoid Arthritis: Can It Affect the Lungs? [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/expert-answers/rheumatoid-arthritis/FAQ-20058245?p=1>] (Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research)
Also in Spanish [<https://www.mayoclinic.org/es/diseases-conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/expert-answers/rheumatoid-arthritis/faq-20058245?p=1>]

Specifics

- Arthritis of the Hand [<https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/diseases--conditions/arthritis-of-the-hand/>] (American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons)
Also in Spanish [<https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/es/diseases--conditions/arthritis-del-hombro-arthritis-of-the-hand/>]
- Arthritis of the Shoulder [<https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/diseases--conditions/arthritis-of-the-shoulder>] (American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons)
Also in Spanish [<https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/es/diseases--conditions/arthritis-del-hombro-arthritis-of-the-shoulder/>]

- Arthritis of the Wrist [<https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/diseases--conditions/arthritis-of-the-wrist/>] (American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons)
- Inflammatory Arthritis of the Hip [<https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/diseases--conditions/inflammatory-arthritis-of-the-hip>] (American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons)
- Rheumatoid Arthritis of the Foot and Ankle [<https://orthoinfo.aaos.org/en/diseases--conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis-of-the-foot-and-ankle>] (American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society)

Genetics

- Rheumatoid arthritis: MedlinePlus Genetics [<https://medlineplus.gov/genetics/condition/rheumatoid-arthritis>]  (National Library of Medicine)

Videos and Tutorials

- Rheumatoid Arthritis Educational Video Series [<https://www.hopkinsarthritis.org/arthritis-info/rheumatoid-arthritis/rheumatoid-arthritis-for-patients/>]  (Johns Hopkins Medicine)

Test Your Knowledge

- Rheumatoid Arthritis Symptoms Quiz [https://medlineplus.gov/ency/quiz/000431_20.htm] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/quiz/000431_80.htm]

Statistics and Research

- Arthritis by the Numbers: Book of Trusted Facts and Figures [<https://www.arthritis.org/getmedia/73a9f02d-7f91-4084-91c3-0ed0b11c5814/abtn-2020-final.pdf>] (Arthritis Foundation) - **PDF**
- Inflammation [<https://www.niehs.nih.gov/health/topics/conditions/inflammation>]  (National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences)
- Parent Smoking Linked to Rheumatoid Arthritis [<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2021/11/parent-smoking-linked-rheumatoid-arthritis>]  (National Institutes of Health)
Also in Spanish [<https://salud.nih.gov/recursos-de-salud/nih-noticias-de-salud/el-tabaquismo-de-los-padres-durante-la-infancia-vinculado-a>]

Clinical Trials

- ClinicalTrials.gov: Arthritis, Rheumatoid [<https://clinicaltrials.gov/search?cond=%22Arthritis,+Rheumatoid%22&aggFilters=status:not%20rec>]  (National Institutes of Health)

Journal Articles

References and abstracts from MEDLINE/PubMed (National Library of Medicine)

- Article: A controlled comparative study of the effects of methotrexate and pharmacogenetic... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40742006>]
- Article: Disease activity and treatment response in early rheumatoid arthritis: an exploratory... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40713837>]
- Article: Efficacy and Safety of Biosimilar CT-P47 Versus Reference Tocilizumab: 1-Year Results... [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/40650731>]
- Rheumatoid Arthritis -- see more articles [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/?term=%22Arthritis%2C+Rheumatoid%22%5Bmajr%3Anoexp%5D+AND+humans%5Bmh%5D+AND+english%5Bla%5D+AND+%22last+1+Year%22+%5Bdat%5D+AND+%28patient+education+handout%5Bpt%5D+OR+guideline%5Bpt%5D+OR+clinical+trial%5Bpt%5D%29++NOT+%28letter%5Bpt%5D+OR+case+reports%5Bpt%5D+OR+editorial%5Bpt%5D+OR+comment%5Bpt%5D%29+AND+free+full+text%5Bsb%5D+>]

Find an Expert

- Arthritis Foundation: Local Office Directory [<https://www.arthritis.org/local-offices/>] (Arthritis Foundation)

- Find a Rheumatologist [<https://my.rheumatology.org/rheumatology-provider-directory>] (American College of Rheumatology)
- National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/>] 
Also in Spanish [<https://www.niams.nih.gov/es/portal-en-espanol>]

Women

- Pregnancy and Rheumatic Disease [<https://rheumatology.org/pregnancy-rheumatic-disease>]
(American College of Rheumatology)
Also in Spanish [<https://rheumatology.org/embarazo-y-enfermedad-reumatica>]

Patient Handouts

- Collagen vascular disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001223.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/001223.htm>]
- Felty syndrome [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000445.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000445.htm>]
- Rheumatoid arthritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000431.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000431.htm>]
- Rheumatoid factor (RF) [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003548.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/003548.htm>]
- Rheumatoid lung disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000113.htm>] (Medical Encyclopedia)
Also in Spanish [<https://medlineplus.gov/spanish/ency/article/000113.htm>]



MEDICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA

- Antimitochondrial antibody [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003529.htm>]
- C-reactive protein [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003356.htm>]
- Collagen vascular disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001223.htm>]
- Complement [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003456.htm>]
- Complement component 3 (C3) [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003539.htm>]
- Complement component 4 [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003354.htm>]
- Cryoglobulins [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003555.htm>]
- Felty syndrome [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000445.htm>]
- Necrotizing vasculitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000432.htm>]
- Protein electrophoresis - serum [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003540.htm>]
- Quantitative nephelometry test [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003545.htm>]

Rheumatoid arthritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000431.htm>]

Rheumatoid factor (RF) [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003548.htm>]

Rheumatoid lung disease [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000113.htm>]

Rheumatoid pneumoconiosis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000137.htm>]

Scleritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001003.htm>]

Serum globulin electrophoresis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003544.htm>]

Thyroid peroxidase antibody [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003556.htm>]

Uveitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/001005.htm>]

Related Health Topics

Ankylosing Spondylitis [<https://medlineplus.gov/ankylosingspondylitis.html>]

Arthritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/arthritis.html>]

Juvenile Arthritis [<https://medlineplus.gov/juvenilearthritis.html>]

National Institutes of Health

The primary NIH organization for research on *Rheumatoid Arthritis* is the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases [<http://www.niams.nih.gov/>]

Other Languages

Find health information in languages other than English [<https://medlineplus.gov/languages/rheumatoidarthritis.html>] on *Rheumatoid Arthritis*

NIH MedlinePlus Magazine

Advantage, Wozniacki: Tennis Star on Taking Charge of Life with RA

[<https://magazine.medlineplus.gov/article/advantage-wozniacki-tennis-star-on-taking-charge-of-life-with-ra>]

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