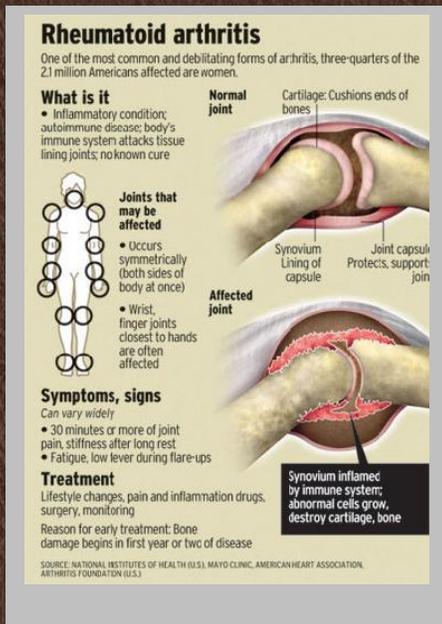


JUST DIAGNOSED: RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is a systemic autoimmune disease. Systemic means it can affect more than just joints. Autoimmune means the body's immune system attacks itself usually targeting the joint lining known as the synovium. The course of RA (severity, joints affected) is different for everyone.



CAUSES AND RISK FACTORS:

The cause of RA is as yet unknown. Some theories include genetic predisposition, infectious triggers, or other factors such as smoking or stress. Women get RA three times more often than men, usually beginning in the childbearing years ages 25 to 45 however it can occur at any age.

DIAGNOSIS: Doctors use a combination of examination, your report of symptoms and tests including laboratory tests and possibly x-ray, ultrasound, CT or MRI scans, to diagnose RA.

TREATMENT: RA usually requires a combination of medications to treat. You may be prescribed one or more of the following drug classes.

Cortisone: Prednisone or similar medication: Reduce inflammation.

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDS): Reduces inflammation and pain.

Disease modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs): Reduce disease activity.

Biologic agents: Reduce disease activity, newest class of medication.

General Treatment Guidelines

RA should be treated early in the onset of the disease. The goal is to prevent damage. Aggressive treatment often includes a combination of medications. A doctor specializing in treatment of arthritis called a rheumatologist should manage your RA care.

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PO Box 602
Rapid City, SD 57709
www.blackhillsarthritis.org

SELF-MANAGEMENT OF RA

Medications are the cornerstone of RA treatment but there are things YOU can do. Use of heat or ice packs on the joints can reduce pain and swelling. A good rule of thumb is to apply for 20 minutes at a time with a barrier between the skin and the pack to prevent damage to the skin or tissues.



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What about complementary therapies?

Some complementary therapies that have been found to be beneficial are massage and acupuncture. The most important thing to know about complementary therapies is to discuss them with your doctor before starting.

Helpful websites:

www.arthritis.org

www.rheumatology.org (look for patient resources)

www.blackhillsarthritis.org

EXERCISE

A referral to a physical or occupational therapist may be very helpful in developing a good exercise plan. Water based exercise is especially good for people with RA and there are Arthritis Foundation warm water exercise classes available in the Rapid City area.

TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Diet: Many people wonder if there is a diet they can follow to improve their RA. Following a healthy diet with additional focus on weight management, adequate calcium, Vitamin D and omega 3 oils is recommended. There is no known diet cure for RA.

Education: learning everything you can about RA from reliable sources is empowering and makes you an active well informed part of your health care team.

Time/energy management: Learn to budget your time and energy and focus on what is important and enjoyable for you. You don't have to do everything in one day!

Seek Support: Studies show people with adequate levels of support do much better in following their medical regimen. Black Hills Arthritis Association has a monthly support group! We meet the second Saturday of each month from 9-11 at Rapid City Regional Hospital in the Sylvan Room. We also have an ongoing email based support group. If interested just email info@blackhillsarthritis.com.

“When I was first diagnosed with RA I knew I would seek the best professional to treat it I could and that treatments today are better than they were yesteryear”



-Vickie B., Person with RA