

Rheumatoid arthritis

CONDITION GUIDE



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How to use this guide

We know the diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) can be overwhelming. This guide is to help answer concerns, while giving you important information to share with family or friends.

Your health care provider has suggested that you start treatment. This means that your health care provider believes you have a good chance of responding to medicine. We're here to help, every step of the way. Remember that taking your medicine as prescribed will help you lead a healthy life. Please do not stop taking your medicine without checking with your health care provider.

Health care providers have learned how to individualize treatment so that each patient has the best chance of responding. The treatment you receive may differ from the treatment of other patients with rheumatoid arthritis. This is one of the reasons it is so important that you talk about any questions or concerns you may have with your health care provider or with a nurse or pharmacist.

There are four parts to this guide

1 Understanding your RA

We're here to help you become a better informed member. In this chapter, we'll discuss how to live your best life with an RA diagnosis.

2 Taking care of your body

Find ways to reduce stress — both physically and mentally — with proactive approaches to your health.

3 Understanding RA medicines

Want to learn more about the treatment approaches that your health care provider or specialty pharmacy care team might suggest? We'll go over possible treatment plans, including medicine and other ways to help manage RA in a way that works best for you.

4 Understanding side effects

Learn when to call your health care provider and what tips can help relieve side effects.



Understanding your RA

According to the Mayo Clinic and the Arthritis Foundation, an estimated 1.5 million people, or about 0.6 percent of the U.S. adult population, have rheumatoid arthritis.¹

Whether you're newly diagnosed, or you've been living with RA for a while, this guide is all about helping you become better informed about RA and your options for staying healthy.

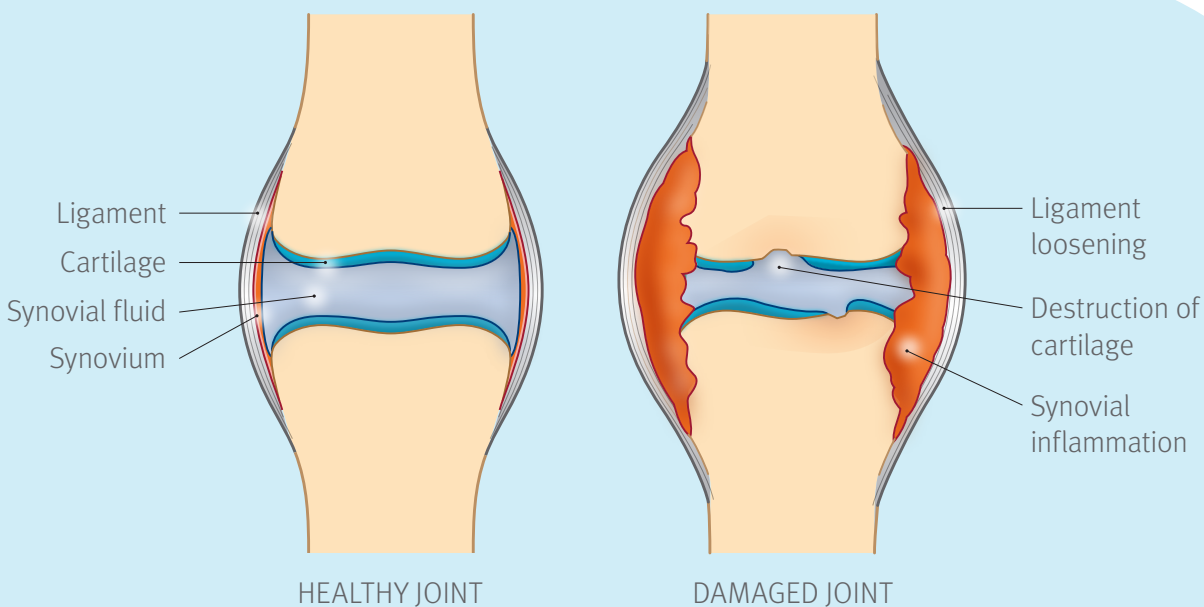
What is rheumatoid arthritis?

RA is a chronic (long-term) condition. It's also an autoimmune disease. This means that your immune system, which is designed to protect your body and attack diseases, attacks your body instead.² RA attacks both the cartilage and the bones within your joints and causes permanent damage. RA typically affects the smaller joints first, like those in the hands, wrists, elbows and feet. Later on, RA may spread to larger joints, such as knees and hips.

RA causes swelling and thickening of the synovium, which is the soft tissue that lines your joints. This swelling damages the structures inside the joint. This can make moving the joint more difficult.³ It can also cause muscles and tendons to become weak. It may cause deformity, as well. All these things can make daily activities more challenging.

For a long time, RA was seen as a disabling condition, but there have been many medical breakthroughs and improvements in treatment. Today, due to advances in therapy, more patients with RA live independently without major disability.

There is still no cure for RA, but new and more targeted treatment options have become available. Early and aggressive treatment has allowed many patients to slow and sometimes even stop the progression of the disease. The right medicine therapy can help you reduce pain, remain active and live a full life.



Role of the immune system in RA⁴

	NORMAL IMMUNE SYSTEM	IMMUNE SYSTEM IN RA
Definition	The immune system is the body's defense against infection and disease that cause illness.	RA is an autoimmune disease that keeps the body's immune system from working properly. In rheumatoid arthritis, the immune system mistakes healthy cells for foreign cells.
What is attacked	The body's immune system attacks cells that don't belong in the body (bacteria, viruses or foreign cells).	The immune system attacks healthy cells in the joints and sometimes other organs as well.
How it works	The immune system attacks or kills foreign cells that enter into the body.	White blood cells (fighter cells) move into the joint. They cause the release of chemicals that result in inflammation, swelling and pain.

What are the risk factors?

The exact cause of RA is unknown, but certain factors place individuals at an increased risk. There is no known way to prevent RA.

● You're not alone

An RA diagnosis may leave you feeling very much alone. Find a support group within your community, and friends and family who can be there for you at any time. Keeping a positive outlook can enhance your treatment.

- ❖ **Age:** RA typically affects people during middle age, but the frequency increases with age.⁵
- ❖ **Race:** RA affects all races and ethnic groups.⁵
- ❖ **Gender:** 75 percent of RA occurs in women. This suggests that hormones may play a role.⁶
- ❖ **Family history:** People with RA in their families may have a higher risk for developing it themselves. But many people with RA have no family history.¹
- ❖ **Environment:** Research suggests that exposure to cigarette smoke, air pollution or insecticides may increase risk in some people. Scientists theorize that bacteria or viruses may play a role as well.¹

Understanding complications and symptoms

Other parts of the body may be affected if treatment is not started early. Treatment should start soon after symptoms develop or as the disease progresses.

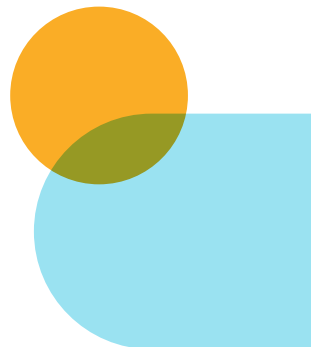
Early treatment may prevent other health issues sometimes caused by RA

- ❖ **Heart disease:** Heart disease may occur 10 years sooner for people with RA.
- ❖ **Eye problems:** Damage to the eyes may cause dryness, burning and itching.
- ❖ **Lung/breathing problems:** RA can cause inflammation of the lining of the lungs (or, pleurisy). This can cause sharp pain when breathing. RA can also cause scarring inside the lungs. This can lead to shortness of breath, dry cough and tiredness.
- ❖ **Stomach problems:** Some medicines used to treat RA increase the risk of gastrointestinal bleeding and ulcers.

For some people with RA, symptoms come on gradually over years. For others, symptoms may occur more quickly. No matter how your symptoms appear, they can often change in severity. Periods of increased symptoms — called “flares,” or “flare-ups” — may alternate with times of little to no symptoms. The period with few or no symptoms is called “remission.”

Common symptoms of RA

POTENTIAL SYMPTOMS	DESCRIPTION
Joint pain and swelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Joint pain and swelling tend to occur in the same place on both sides of the body (symmetrically). For example, if one wrist is affected, often the other is as well.
Joint stiffness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● RA can cause joint stiffness that lasts more than 30 minutes, and often for several hours.
Flu-like symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Many patients with RA experience flu-like symptoms including a general ill feeling, tiredness and sometimes a low-grade fever.
Rheumatoid nodules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some patients with RA develop rheumatoid nodules. These are hard lumps under the skin near affected joints.



Pain and RA

Rheumatoid arthritis is sometimes called “an invisible disease.” You may be experiencing pain, but others may not be aware of what you are going through.

Common movements like pushing, pulling or twisting may be painful — this is part of the disease. Pay attention to the pain, and don't try to work through it. This can worsen your pain and increase the possibility of joint deformities. Be patient with your body, share concerns or successes with your health care provider and find support from those you care about.

Your health care provider or physical therapist may recommend wearing a splint to help reduce inflammation and pain in a particular joint. Ice or a cold pack can also reduce pain in an affected joint. For pain on weight-bearing joints, special shoes with good heel and arch support or special toe supports can help. If your RA has caused deformities of your feet or toes, special molded shoes can be made for you.

Helping your family and friends understand a RA diagnosis

It's up to you to decide when and how to tell your family and friends about your diagnosis. The people who care about you may have many questions, and may be worried. If these questions seem overwhelming, or you're having trouble responding, consider saying, “I'll share more information when I learn more from my doctor.”

Remember that people often struggle for the right words when they find out that someone they care is facing a new health journey. Your family and friends will want to find the best ways to support your emotional and physical needs. It's okay to ask for help and receive help.





Taking care of your body

Fortunately, there are ways you can reduce your physical and mental health stress by being proactive in a few areas. This includes lifestyle habits to cope with the symptoms of RA, and maintaining a healthy diet, regular exercise, a smart sleep schedule and a great emotional support network.



Be flexible

One strategy that seems to work well with RA treatment is to allow yourself to be flexible. Being flexible means putting greater emphasis on listening to your body and its needs—whether eating, sleeping or being active. When you're in tune with your body, you'll find that you'll be better able to manage fatigue, eat a balanced diet and have better communication with your health care team.

Be your own best advocate

People who take part in their care may report less pain, fewer visits to see their health care provider and better quality of life.

Things you can do include

- ❖ Using joint protection techniques
- ❖ Paying attention to how your body moves
- ❖ Adapting everyday activities to your ability
- ❖ Protecting your bone health
- ❖ Managing pain and flares
- ❖ Eating healthy foods
- ❖ Exercising regularly
- ❖ Supporting your emotional health

● *A note on hand movement*

Take special note of how you use your fingers during your normal day. Often, you can find easier ways to perform tasks that can put less stress on your joints. Avoid forceful gripping, pinching or making a tight fist. Moving your fingers toward your thumb instead of toward your little finger and holding things in the palms of your hands instead of between your thumb and fingers may help ease stress on your joints.

Eat healthy⁷

The most important thing you can do for your body is to eat well and maintain a healthy weight.

According to the Arthritis Foundation, individuals with RA may benefit from a high-fiber diet that may lower inflammation. A balanced diet includes plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. It also limits salt, sugar, saturated fat and alcohol. It may include daily vitamins and minerals. A diet low in saturated fat but high in omega-3 fatty acids, may help. Consult your health care provider before beginning a new diet program.

Tips for safe and healthy eating

- ❖ Eat small meals or snacks every three to four hours instead of three large meals each day
- ❖ Do not eat raw or undercooked fish or shellfish
- ❖ Drink at least eight glasses of water or clear, caffeine-free fluids every day
- ❖ Ask your health care provider if you would benefit from dietary supplements



ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

Ask your health care provider if there are vitamins or minerals that could help to manage your symptoms and keep you healthy. Also, note how your diet affects your symptoms. Try to avoid any foods that seem to increase symptoms.

Talk to your health care provider before taking any nutritional supplements. These can be harmful and life-threatening under some circumstances.



Maintaining a healthy weight⁸

There is no diet that is universally best for people with RA. Eating a healthy diet gives your body the fuel it needs to perform at its best. Invest the time to learn how to improve your diet.

Good nutrition can help

- ❖ Improve immune function
- ❖ Reduce inflammation
- ❖ Increase muscle strength
- ❖ Increase energy
- ❖ Stabilize mood
- ❖ Manage fatigue

A healthy weight is one that allows your body to function at its best. To find out if your weight is at a healthy level, you should know your body mass index (BMI) — [nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose-wt/BMI/bicalc.htm](https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose-wt/BMI/bicalc.htm).



Exercise regularly⁹

When your body is fighting any disease, you may experience more fatigue than usual. As strange as it may seem, light exercise may actually boost your energy level. It can also help you cope with stress and manage your weight. Try to exercise regularly. Consult your health care provider before beginning a new exercise program.

Stretching and low-impact exercise can have an impact on your body and treatment. Reaching for the sky, or your toes, can help with both flexibility and range of motion.¹⁰

Your ability to move any joint without pain may change from day to day. Pay attention to your pain and take note of activities that make it worse. If pain lasts longer than an hour after a particular activity, the activity may have been too stressful. Work to find ways to avoid or change those activities to reduce pain. Keep in mind that your joints can be more easily damaged when they are painful or swollen.

Use heat therapy

Heat helps to reduce muscle stiffness and eases pain. Walking or doing joint exercises keeps muscles healthy and maintains range of motion. Massage and deep heat therapy may also be beneficial. Water exercises in a therapy pool are well-tolerated by most people with RA.

● *Making changes*

Making many changes at once can be overwhelming. If it's necessary, incorporate changes into your routine slowly, over time. In some cases you may find that you need to change the way you do some things sooner, in order to reduce pain.



Listen to your body

You may be able to reduce strain on your joints by using good body mechanics. Here are some ideas for small changes that can make a big difference:

When sitting

- ❖ Maintain good posture
- ❖ Use good back and foot support
- ❖ Raise the height of your chair to reduce stress on your hips and knees
- ❖ Position your work surface two inches below your bent elbow
- ❖ Support your forearms and upper legs

When standing

- ❖ Maintain good posture
- ❖ Make sure your work surface is high enough so you don't have to stoop over

When bending to pick up an object

- ❖ Use your knees and hips, or sit on a chair and bend from there

When lifting

- ❖ If the object is heavy, keep it close to your chest and let your forearms do the work
- ❖ If the object is light, carry it with an open palm
- ❖ Instead of lifting, slide the object over a flat surface

Sleep well




Your body needs rest to heal and recharge. This is especially important during RA treatment. One of the best things you can do for your body is to make sure you are getting eight or more hours of sleep each night. If your body is telling you that you're tired and you are having trouble falling asleep, make sure to mention it to your health care provider.

Supporting your emotional health

Maintaining your emotional health can help to support your physical health. Some people become overwhelmed with their diagnosis and the life adjustments they need to make. This is normal. Managing your stress and asking for help from friends, family or professionals are important aspects of staying healthy. Many people also benefit from joining in-person or online support groups.

Stress

Whether you're newly diagnosed or you've been living with RA for some time, at certain points of your treatment you may experience stress. Stress may make the challenges of life difficult to handle — especially when it comes to your body. Here are three ways you can help manage stress:

-  **Write it down:** Record your thoughts in a journal and read through it often. Celebrate daily successes. You are more than this disease.
-  **Take a break:** When you're in the midst of a particularly difficult moment, step back and take a deep breath. Even taking a small nap or watching something you enjoy on TV may help brighten your mood.
-  **Find a support group:** Every person needs a healthy balance of people that are able to help in stressful situations. Keep the phone numbers of family or friends you trust handy and reach out to them as often as needed.



 FOR SUPPORT

**National Suicide
Prevention Hotline**

1.800.273.8255

TTY 1.800.799.4889

National 211 Helpline

www.211.org

Depression

Depression is not a character flaw or weakness. It's a health problem that starts from a chemical imbalance in the brain. If you have thoughts of suicide or of harming yourself or others, call 911 or go to the emergency room.

A note on depression

Everyone feels sad now and then. Sometimes a deep sadness or loss of interest in activities you usually enjoy can actually be a medical illness called depression. Depression can cause deeply sad feelings or high anxiety around everyday activities. This may make it hard to live your life the way you want.





If you think you may be depressed, talk with your doctor. Your doctor may prescribe an antidepressant medicine to help with your symptoms. Please note that it may take several weeks for you to feel the full benefit of antidepressants. Your health care provider may also recommend counseling for you. It may be helpful to speak to a mental health professional about the impact RA has had on your life.



RA treatment approaches



Taking an active role in your care includes paying careful attention to both symptoms and treatment. It also means talking openly with your health care provider. This part of the guide can help you:

-  Note your disease symptoms and medicine's side effects
-  Understand more about how your condition might affect your quality of life
-  Understand more about how to get the most from your medicine therapy
-  Record questions or concerns to discuss with your health care provider

Staying on track with your medicines

Here is what you can do to help get good results from your RA medicine therapy:

DO

- ❖ Call your health care provider or pharmacist with any questions you may have about your RA medicines.
- ❖ Educate yourself about your RA medicines, especially the risks and warnings.
- ❖ Keep a list of the names and amounts of medicines you are taking.
- ❖ Stick to the medicine schedule your health care provider has prescribed.
- ❖ Add taking your medicines into your normal routine.
- ❖ Check with your health care provider before starting any new medicines, including vitamins, supplements, herbal remedies, prescription medicines and over-the-counter products.
- ❖ Drink plenty of fluids. The best choices are water, clear fruit juices and other caffeine-free drinks.

DON'T

- ❖ Skip or change doses. By taking your medicine as prescribed, you will improve your chances for a positive treatment outcome.



Treatment strategies and goals

Different people have different types of responses to RA treatment. Health care providers use these response types to determine when an individual may need to change treatment. RA is a chronic, progressive disease. This means it can worsen over time, especially if left untreated.

Realistic treatment goals include

- ❖ Slowing the progression of the disorder
- ❖ Reducing the frequency and severity of relapses
- ❖ Improving recovery from relapses
- ❖ Providing relief of symptoms

No medicine can cure RA. Rather, medicines can slow the progression of RA, reduce the symptoms and improve your quality of life.

Methods for administering RA medicines include

- ❖ Oral (by mouth)
- ❖ Subcutaneous injection (under the skin)
- ❖ Intramuscular injection (into the muscle)
- ❖ Intravenous infusion (into a vein, usually given by a health care provider)

If you're worried about giving yourself an injection, your health care provider, nurse or pharmacist can talk to you about any concerns. They will take the time to demonstrate how to inject your medicine properly. Sometimes, they can give you a device that can help make it easier for you to inject yourself.

Try the following to help stay on time with your medicine schedule

- ❖ Consider using a medicine reminder system or app to help keep track of your medicines, their dosages and the time you should be taking them
- ❖ Make taking your medicine part of your daily routine
- ❖ To help you remember your medicine, take your pills at the same time as another routine task, like when brushing your teeth
- ❖ Set an alarm on a watch or cell phone, or set a timer to remind you to take your medicine



● *The future is bright*

RA studies are happening every day. Clinical trials for new treatments are happening year-round. These studies continue to help health care providers make progress with RA. You never know when the next clinical trial can lead to an incredible discovery.

Medicines and food

Some medicines are absorbed best with food in the stomach. Others need to be taken on an empty stomach. Ask your health care provider or pharmacist if you're not sure.

Here are some things to consider about medicine and food

- ❖ Depending on the medicine, food may increase or decrease side effects
- ❖ You may need to avoid some foods while taking certain medicines
- ❖ Ask your health care provider about food restrictions

Medicines and other treatments for RA^{11,12}

The medicines used to treat RA fall into one of four classes: nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), corticosteroids, disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs) and biologic response modifiers (BRMs). Surgery is also an option, but is usually a last resort. You and your doctor should discuss the best treatment options for you.



Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs¹³

NSAIDs can help reduce the swelling and painful joint inflammation caused by RA. Over-the-counter versions contain a lower dose of the active ingredient. Depending on your treatment plan, your health care provider may prescribe a stronger NSAID, which has higher levels of the active ingredient.

NSAIDs treat some symptoms, but they can't stop RA from getting worse. They're usually prescribed along with other medicines that may be able to slow the condition.

DRUG NAME	AVAILABLE FORMS	POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS	IMPORTANT INFORMATION
Over-the-counter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral tablet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stomach pain or heartburn • Increased tendency to bleed • Dizziness and lightheadedness • Kidney problems • Gastrointestinal bleeding • Skin reactions • Ringing in the ears • Allergic reactions • Fluid retention • Can increase the risk of heart attack and stroke • If taken in high doses or for a long time, may cause <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – liver or kidney damage – ulcers – intestinal bleeding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take with food • Do not take two different NSAIDS at the same time
Prescription-only			
Advil, Motrin (ibuprofen)			
Aleve (naproxen)			
Bayer (aspirin)			
Celebrex (celecoxib)			
Voltaren, Zipsor, Zorvolex (diclofenac)			
Dolobid (diflunisal)			
Lodine (etodolac)			
Nalfon (fenoprofen)			
Indocin (indomethacin)			
ketoprofen			
Mobic (meloxicam)			
Naprosyn, Naprelan, Anaprox (naproxen)			
Daypro (oxaprozin)			
Feldene (piroxicam)			
Clinoril (sulindac)			
tolmetin			

Corticosteroids^{14,15}

Health care providers prescribe corticosteroids for short periods to relieve joint swelling. They often are used to manage flares. Corticosteroids can also be used by patients who don't respond to NSAIDs or who cannot take them because of other medical conditions.

DRUG NAME	AVAILABLE FORMS	POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS	IMPORTANT INFORMATION
cortisone	● Oral tablet	● Bruising	● Store at room temperature
Decadron (dexamethasone)	● Injection	● Weight gain	● Take with food
Cortef (hydrocortisone)		● Fluid retention	● Monitor bone health while taking this medicine
Medrol (methylprednisolone)		● Trouble sleeping	● Do not stop these medicines abruptly
prednisone		● Cataracts from long-term use	● Taper dose off over time with guidance from your doctor
		● Mood swings	● Place all used syringes in a Sharps container. Never throw a syringe into a trash can
		● Increased appetite	
		● High blood sugar	
		● High blood fat	
		● Hardening of arteries	
		● Osteoporosis from long-term use	



Disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs¹⁶

DMARDs are longer-term treatments. They can slow joint damage by blocking parts of the immune system. If your health care provider prescribes a DMARD, you will not notice its effects immediately. The drug has to reach a certain level in your blood before it can take effect. It is best to start this type of medicine within three months of diagnosis.

DRUG NAME	AVAILABLE FORMS	POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS	IMPORTANT INFORMATION
<p>Common DMARDs</p> <p>Plaquenil (hydroxychloroquine)</p> <p>Arava (leflunomide)</p> <p>Otrexup, Rasuvo, Rheumatrex, Trexall (methotrexate)</p> <p>Azulfidine (sulfasalazine)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oral tablet • Injection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea • Stomach pain or upset • Headache • Rash • Itching • Mouth or throat sores • Hair loss • Hair growth • Skin discoloration (hydroxychloroquine) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store at room temperature • Protect from light • Have regular blood tests to monitor immune function • Place all used syringes in a Sharps container. Never throw a syringe into a trash can
<p>Janus kinase (JAK) inhibitors</p> <p>Xeljanz (tofacitinib)</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potentially toxic to liver, kidney and bone marrow 	
<p>Other less common DMARDs</p> <p>Cytoxan (cyclophosphamide)</p> <p>Depen, Cuprimine (penicillamine)</p> <p>Imuran, Azasan (azathioprine)</p> <p>Neoral, Sandimmune, Gengraf (cyclosporine)</p> <p>Ridaura (gold compounds)</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flu-like symptoms • Susceptibility to infections • Increased risk for certain types of cancers 	

Biologic response modifiers (BRMs)¹⁷

BRMs are a new class of medicine. BRMs block the destructive effects of the immune system on joints. They can slow RA progression, and may cause remission in some cases. BRMs injected either into a vein (intravenously) or just under the skin (subcutaneously). This class of drugs may help patients who have not responded well to other treatments. BRMs may be used in combination with other RA medicines. The long-term effects of BRMs are not yet known.

DRUG NAME	AVAILABLE FORMS	POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS	IMPORTANT INFORMATION
Orencia (abatacept)	● Oral tablet	● Increased risk for serious infection and certain types of cancer	● Have regular blood tests to monitor immune function
Humira (adalimumab)	● Injection		
Kineret (anakinra)		● Upper respiratory infection	● Keep refrigerated, or per package directions
Cimzia (certolizumab pegol)		● Pain and rash at injection site	● Contact your health care provider before you get any vaccines
Enbrel (etanercept)		● Headache	● Place all used syringes in a Sharps container. Never throw a syringe into a trash can
Simponi and Simponi Aria (golimumab)		● Nausea	● Contact your health care provider if you develop symptoms of a cold or flu (fever, sore throat, fatigue, etc.)
Remicade (infliximab)		● Increased blood pressure	
Inflectra (infliximab)		● Flu-like symptoms	
Rituxan (rituximab)		● Abnormal liver function tests	
Actemra (tocilizumab)			

● *A note on RA treatment*

Medical treatment has improved over the last few decades. Today, more people are diagnosed early, before joints become permanently damaged. Prompt medicine therapy increases quality of life by reducing symptoms and preventing disability. Treatment needs differ from person to person and may change over time.¹ Remember, your body functions best with the right lifestyle choices, good communication with your health care provider and taking your medicine as directed.

Surgical options¹⁸

At some point, medicines and lifestyle modifications may fail to relieve symptoms or to slow joint damage. You and your health care provider may consider surgery. Surgery can often help restore the use of your joints and may reduce pain. Surgery may be a good option for some people, but it has potential risks, such as bleeding, infection and pain. Discuss the benefits and risks with your health care provider.

TYPE OF SURGERY	PURPOSE
Arthroscopic surgery	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Removes loose cartilage or swollen tissue and smooths joint surfaces
Tendon reconstruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Repairs and rebuilds tendons that have been damaged by inflammation and joint damage
Synovectomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Removes inflamed tissue around joints. This provides temporary relief (the inflamed tissue will eventually grow back)
Joint fusion surgery (arthrodesis)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Fuses two bones on each end of a joint, eliminating the joint itself● Used to relieve pain in patients whose joints have been eroded or destroyed
Joint replacement surgery (arthroplasty)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Replaces arthritic joint with artificial one made of metal or plastic

Understanding side effects



You may have concerns about possible side effects of your RA medicine. That concern can sometimes make it hard to stay on-track. It helps to set realistic expectations about how your treatment may affect you. Remember that the medicine you're taking now may be different from medicines you've taken before. Your current medicines may have fewer, less severe, or completely different side effects. Talk with your health care provider about any side effect that doesn't go away after a little while.

Possible side effects

- 1 If you're having trouble sleeping,** consider avoiding large meals or caffeine too close to bedtime. You may also consider developing a peaceful bedtime routine that can help your body and mind better relax in the evening. Many people have found that relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation or deep breathing can help with alleviating sleep problems.
- 2 If headaches are becoming more regular,** consider drinking more fluids — especially water. Some people have also found that dark rooms or warm baths can help reduce some headache symptoms. Make sure to speak to your health care provider or a pharmacist before you use an over-the-counter pain reliever.
- 3 If you are experiencing a fever,** make sure you are drinking plenty of fluids. Remember that a high fever or a fever lasting more than 48 hours needs to be addressed with your doctor immediately.
- 4 If you're experiencing a dry mouth,** it's recommended to start each day with a glass of water. Make sure to get regular dental check-ups and let your dentist know about any medicines you may be taking.

Skin rash¹⁹

Medicines for RA can cause dry, itchy skin. Constant scratching can lead to infection.

Try the following to keep your skin in optimal shape:

- ❖ Use an oatmeal bath to protect your skin and prevent itching. Wash with an unscented moisturizing soap
- ❖ Use lukewarm water instead of hot
- ❖ Drink plenty of fluids to keep your skin hydrated

Nausea, vomiting and diarrhea

Nausea and vomiting are common side effects of RA medicines. Nausea and vomiting may lead to dehydration. They can also reduce your appetite and cause weight loss. These things can also interfere with your treatment. Work with your health care provider to help manage any nausea and vomiting with changes in diet as well as medicine. It's important you keep your body fed, hydrated and well-rested.

- ❖ For nausea, consider taking small bites of a cracker, or try eating foods at room temperature
- ❖ For vomiting, sip liquids throughout the day, rather than drinking a large volume at one time
- ❖ For diarrhea, consider limiting foods that contain caffeine and taking dairy out of your diet as well as avoiding foods that cause cramping such as, cabbage, beans, onions, green peppers and carbonated drinks
- ❖ In some cases, RA medicines can cause serious bleeding. If you notice darkened stools, or blood in the stool, contact your doctor immediately

Mouth sores²⁰

Some RA medicines can cause mouth sores. These may range from an inconvenience to something more severe. Notify your health care provider if you have mouth sores. There are medicines for treatment. To combat mouth sores:

- ❖ Get a dental check-up. Visit your dentist when you begin RA treatment to take care of any unresolved dental issues
- ❖ Brush and floss your teeth regularly. Practice good oral hygiene by taking extra care to brush and floss regularly
- ❖ Use cold therapy. If you experience pain with mouth sores, try swishing with ice chips or cold water. This can cause a numbing effect and reduce some of the pain



Pregnancy and breastfeeding

Let your health care provider know right away if you are pregnant, planning to become pregnant or are breastfeeding. Most RA medicines are not recommended for pregnant women. Some medicines may also affect fertility. Symptoms of RA often improve during pregnancy but return after delivery.

Studies show that some RA medicines may be used during breastfeeding with low risk to the nursing child. If you have questions or concerns, please speak to your health care provider.²²

It is important for male patients to be aware that some RA drugs are present in semen. This could lead to birth defects. Check with your health care provider or pharmacist before engaging in unprotected sex, in case pregnancy should be avoided.

Talk with your health care provider about which medicines are most appropriate for you.

● *A note on folic acid*

Some RA medicines block folate — a form of a water-soluble B vitamin. Your health care provider may suggest you take folic acid to help your liver as well as inflammation. Folic acid can be found in supplements as well as leafy vegetables, some fruits, baked goods and juices. Ask your health care provider if folic acid should be taken before you begin any regimen.²¹



Injection-site reactions

When you inject a medicine, a reaction may occur at the injection site. Reactions may include:

- Redness
- Rash
- Stinging
- Tingling
- Swelling
- Itching
- Pain
- Discomfort

The following steps may help reduce or prevent these reactions

STEP	EXPLANATION
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure the medicine is at room temperature before injection. Applying ice to the site before and after injection may lessen injection-site reactions. Check with your health care provider prior to using ice after the injection. This may affect the absorption of the medicine.
Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that you are using the correct injection method for your medicine
Placement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rotate each new injection site at least one inch apart• Avoid injecting into areas that are swollen, red or hard• Record when and where you inject each time to help keep track
Supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use a new needle for each injection

Protecting your bone health²³

Taking care of your bones can help manage your symptoms. Many patients with RA develop osteoporosis (thinning of the bones). You're especially at risk if you take high doses of medicines like corticosteroids. Talk to your health care provider about whether you may need a bone density test.

To help prevent osteoporosis

- Eat foods high in calcium
- Take in vitamin D to help your body absorb calcium. Sources of vitamin D include sunlight, nutritional supplements, milk products, lean meats, fish, beans, eggs and nuts
- Do gentle exercises approved by your health care provider
- Avoid tobacco products
- Use alcohol only in moderation

When it's time to call your health care provider

Chest pain

This includes discomfort in your chest, esophagus (throat) or lungs. This may feel like a burning or aching chest pain. Seek emergency treatment immediately if you develop chest pain while taking RA medicines, especially if the pain is:

- ❖ Very severe
- ❖ Different from pain you have had before
- ❖ Occurs when you are doing a strenuous activity, such as climbing stairs

Shortness of breath

If you feel short of breath, call your health care provider. Your health care provider will determine if it is related to your RA medicines or another medical problem that requires prompt attention.

Vision changes

Although it is uncommon, some people have sudden changes in vision while taking RA medicine. Call your health care provider right away if you develop:

- ❖ Blurry vision
- ❖ Double vision
- ❖ Light sensitivity



Also call your health care provider right away if you experience

- ❖ Swelling in your legs, feet or ankles
- ❖ Severe diarrhea lasting for more than 48 hours
- ❖ Blood in your stool
- ❖ Fever higher than 100.5°F at any time, or you have a fever lasting longer than 48 hours
- ❖ Extreme fatigue
- ❖ Allergic-type reactions such as trouble breathing, hives, etc.



ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

If you are experiencing a symptom or side effect that is worrying you, it is always best to call your health care provider. Your health care provider will determine if you need immediate attention and the next steps.



Resources

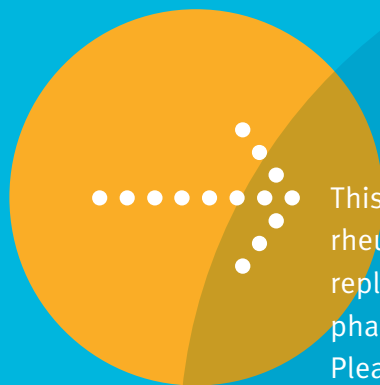
ORGANIZATION	DESCRIPTION
<p>American College of Rheumatology rheumatology.org 404.633.3777</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The American College of Rheumatology (ACR) is an international group involved with education, research and advocacy. The ACR website can be used to search for a rheumatologist in your area and for RA information.
<p>Arthritis Foundation arthritis.org 800.283.7800</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Arthritis Foundation is a U.S. non-profit organization that provides programs, services, advocacy and research related to arthritis and related conditions.
<p>National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases niams.nih.gov Toll free: 877.22.NIAMS (877.226.4267) TTY: 301.565.2966</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) is part of the National Institutes of Health. Its main function is to support research on arthritis and other related diseases. This site has a searchable database of information related to rheumatoid arthritis, including research studies.
<p>Mayo Clinic mayoclinic.com</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mayo Clinic is a non-profit medical practice and medical research group based in Minnesota.
<p>U.S. National Library of Medicine nlm.nih.gov</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The U.S. National Library of Medicine offers visitors online materials for reading on medical issues, disorders and treatments.
<p>Patient Advocate Foundation patientadvocate.org</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF) is a national 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization which provides professional case management services to Americans with chronic, life threatening and debilitating illnesses.

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This guide provides an overview of rheumatoid arthritis. It is not meant to replace medical advice from your doctor, pharmacist or other health care provider. Please contact them for more information. This guide is intended to be accurate. However, Prime Therapeutics is not responsible for loss or damage due to reliance on this guide.

ABOUT PRIME THERAPEUTICS

Purpose-built, mission-driven — we're committed to helping people get the medicine they need to feel better and live well. This mission fuels our passion and drives every decision we make.

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