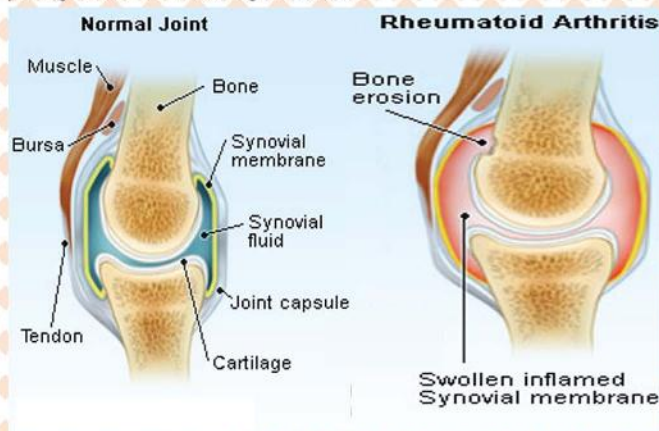


WHAT IS RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS?

Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic systemic inflammatory disease that affects the lining of the joints, causing pain, swelling and stiffness. For reasons no one fully understands, in rheumatoid arthritis, the immune system – which is designed to protect our health by attacking foreign cells such as viruses and bacteria – instead attacks the body's own tissues, specifically the synovium, a thin membrane that lines the joints. As a result of the attack, fluid builds up in the joints, causing pain in the joints and inflammation that is systemic – meaning it can occur throughout the body. Left untreated, rheumatoid arthritis may damage joints so badly that they no longer function. This disease is more common in women and may occur at any age but is most often found in young-adult to middle-age women.



Rheumatoid arthritis is diagnosed following a doctor's examination. X-rays and blood tests may be needed for a more accurate diagnosis.

Symptoms

Rheumatoid arthritis can affect most joints but there is a tendency to feel it in the fingers and wrists. The elbows, knees

and balls of the feet are also common sites. The most prominent feature is symmetrical joint swelling i.e the same joint on both sides of the body are affected. Symptoms may include:

- ❖ **Tender inflamed joints:** They may feel warm to the touch and discoloured.
- ❖ **Stiff joints:** Long periods of rest or using a joint too long or too hard can make lead to a decreased range of motion and or worsen the stiffness.
- ❖ **Joints that have lost normal shape and motion.**
- ❖ **Feeling tired all the time.**

ADJUSTING YOUR LIFESTYLE

Rheumatoid arthritis is an ongoing problem. But it doesn't have to keep you from being active. You can help control it with exercise and a healthy lifestyle. Be sure to see your doctor as requested for checkups and lab work. At some point, your doctors may send you to a **rheumatologist** (a doctor who specialises in arthritis and related diseases).

Follow a healthy lifestyle



While no-one knows what causes arthritis, these tips may help you to reduce your symptoms:

- ❖ Find the right balance
- ❖ Learn ways to reduce or control stress
- ❖ Ask family and friends for help with tasks
- ❖ Stay at your proper weight.

Use Special tools

Even simple tasks can be hard to do when your joints hurt. The special tools and aids listed here can make things easier by reducing strain and protecting your joints. Ask your health provider where to find these and other helpful tools:

- ❖ Long - handled reachers or grabbers
- ❖ Jar openers and button threaders
- ❖ Splints for your wrists or other joints
- ❖ Large grip for pencils, garden tools, and other hand held objects.



Start to exercise

Gentle exercises can make it easier to use your joints. Keep the following in mind when you work out:

- ❖ Choose exercises that improve joint motion and make your muscles stronger. Your doctor or a physical therapist may suggest a few.
- ❖ Low impact activities such as walking, biking, or exercising in a warm pool, are good.
- ❖ Don't push yourself too hard at first. Slowly build up your endurance over time.
- ❖ When pain and stiffness are really bad, cut back on your work out.



MEDICATION MAY HELP

Medications can't cure rheumatoid arthritis, but they can help you feel better. Sometimes they can even suppress the disease (go on a **remission**). Your doctor may prescribe one or more medications. Be sure to take them as directed. They are most helpful at preventing joint damage when started early in the course of the disease.

Tips for taking medications

Your doctor can adjust the type or dose of your medication as needed. For the best results, follow these tips:

- ❖ Keep a list of all your medications. Share the list with each doctor you see.
- ❖ Take your medication only as directed.
- ❖ Don't skip a dose or stop taking medications without talking to your doctor.
- ❖ Find out if your medications should be taken with food.
- ❖ Tell your doctor if you have side effects, such as dizziness or stomach problems.
- ❖ Have any lab tests ordered by your doctor. The results may help your doctor monitor how your medications are affecting you.



Carry your medications with you.

IF SURGERY IS NEEDED

For people with severe joint damage, surgery can decrease pain and make it easier to use a joint. Joint replacement, usually of the hip or knee, is one of the most common surgeries of this condition. Other types of surgery can be done to help control problems in the hands or feet.

Do not be afraid to seek support.

If you have fears and concerns about your health, talk with your health care provider. Talk with other people with rheumatoid arthritis, they will understand you best because they know what your are going through and can provide insight and offer new ways to cope.

Arthritis Hurts

Talking helps

Don't suffer in silence

Nairobi Arthritis Clinic.

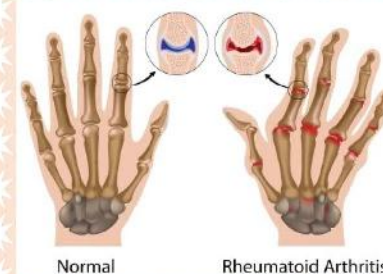
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Living With RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS



**Controlling Joint pain
and Inflammation**