

Your Guide to

Rheumatoid Arthritis Medicines



“We live with rheumatoid arthritis.”

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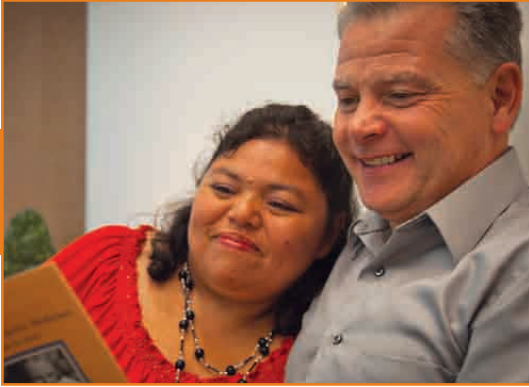
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This guide will help you:

- Learn about rheumatoid arthritis (RA).
- Understand what RA medicines can do for you.
- Choose the right medicine for you with help from your doctor.
- Have a successful doctor's visit.
- Be active and eat well with RA.
- Find more information about RA.



“The doctor told me that the arthritis, this disease, ‘you’re going to conquer it, it’s not going to conquer you.’”

- Susan, age 50

What is rheumatoid arthritis (RA)?

What is RA?

When you have rheumatoid arthritis, your immune system, which usually fights infection, attacks the lining of your joints and causes inflammation. Inflamed joints can be swollen, stiff, and painful. The small joints of your hands and feet are usually affected first.

Once you have RA, it never goes away. You have it for life. Medicines can help with pain and stiffness in your joints and prevent permanent damage to your joints.

How do you get RA?

No one knows exactly what causes RA. It is most likely a combination of your genes and the environment. Smoking also increases your chances of getting RA.

What can RA do to your body?

- Cause swelling, warmth and pain in your joints
- Permanently damage your joints
- Cause inflammation of your eyes, blood vessels, or lungs
- Weaken bones (osteoporosis)
- Cause anemia (low blood cell counts)
- Make you feel very tired
- Give you a fever
- Cause changes in your weight
- Make you feel sad or depressed



“I even flew back to China to try to get a cure for it because... I thought there *was* a cure.”

- Joan, age 25

Who gets RA?

- Anyone can get RA.
- You can get it at any age.
- Women are 2-3 times more likely than men to get RA.

Is there a cure for RA?

No medicine can cure RA, but medicine can slow down damage to joints and ease pain. Most people have to take pills, shots, or medicine by vein (IV or intravenously).

When should you begin to take medicine for RA?

- It is important to take medicine for RA as soon as a doctor tells you that you have it.
- People who take medicine early are able to do everyday activities better and are less likely to have permanent damage to their joints than those who wait.

Do people with RA have other health problems?

Yes, some do. You may have a greater risk of:

- Heart disease
- Certain types of cancer (lymphoma – a blood cancer)
- Broken bones from osteoporosis



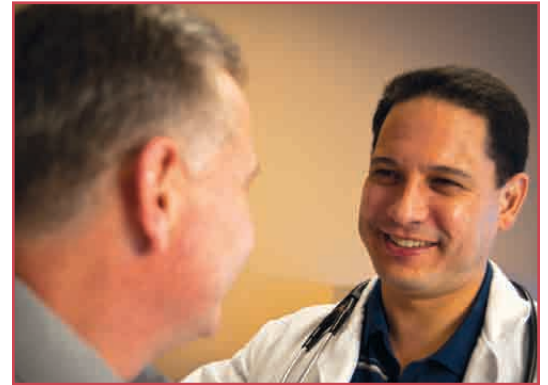
What can RA medicines do for you?

There are many different kinds of medicine for RA. This guide talks about the medicines that can reduce swelling and help prevent damage to the joints. It does not talk about over-the-counter medicines (like Tylenol® or Advil®), pain medicines, or steroids, which help treat the symptoms of RA but do not prevent damage.

RA medicines can:

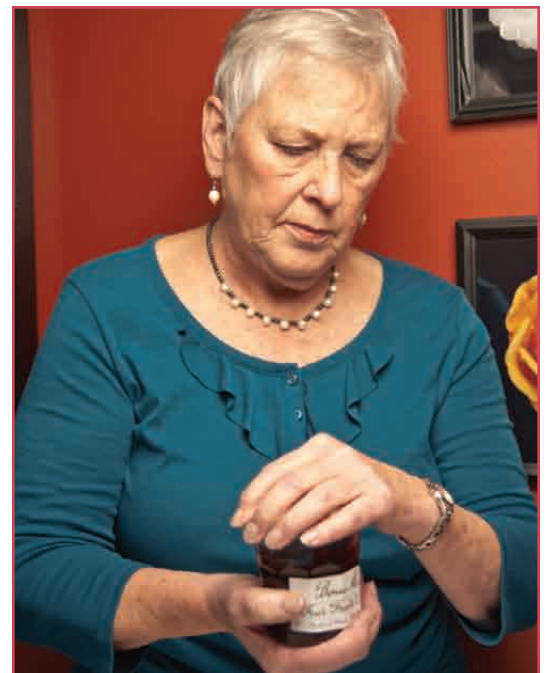
- Help your pain and swelling in your joints
- Slow down changes to your joints, most often in your hands and feet
- Improve the quality of your life

Your doctor can help you pick the best medicine or medicines for you. If one medicine does not work, you have other choices.



“Sometimes I do not understand why I have to take medicine, but then I am reminded of what I go through without it.”

- Maria, age 40



What can happen to the hands and feet of people with RA?

Normal joints

More likely if on medicine early



Mild to moderate swelling in joints

More likely if medicine not working



Permanent damage is less likely if the disease is controlled with medicine. This is why it is important to take medicine for RA as soon as your doctor tells you that you have it.

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

Permanent damage to joints

More likely without medicine







Finding the right medicine for you:

- There are many different medicines for RA.
- You can take RA medicines by:
 -  **Mouth** (orally) 🏠
 -  **Shot** (in the belly or thigh) 🏠🏠
 -  **Vein** (IV - intravenously) 🏠🏠

Key

 = Taken at home

 = Given at doctor's office or hospital

Medical research shows that most RA medicines all work about the same on their own. Most people with RA need to take more than one medicine. Taking two or more medicines together (such as pills and a shot) often works better than just taking one alone. Doctors often combine the RA medicines talked about in this guide with steroids and anti-inflammatory pills.

You may have to try different RA medicines to find the right one for you. Every patient is different. You and your doctor will not know if a medicine will work for you until you try it.

“The medicine really can help, and there are many you can choose from.”
- José, age 69



What are some of the side effects from RA medicines?

Like most other medicines, RA medicines also come with side effects. Most people will have at least one side effect from an RA medicine.

Each medicine has different side effects. Your doctor should talk with you about the side effects of each medicine. If you do not understand the side effects, talk to your doctor. Some common side effects from RA medicines include stomach upset (such as nausea or diarrhea), cold symptoms, or rash.

Some very rare serious side effects include:

- Infections that require you to be in the hospital and get antibiotics by vein
- Some kinds of cancer (skin or blood)

Visits with your RA doctor and blood tests can help identify side effects from the medicines. It is important to work together with your RA doctor to help prevent side effects.

Having a side effect does not mean you have to stop the medicine. You should always ask your doctor if you have questions and before you stop a medicine. Most side effects are not emergencies, but call your doctor or nurse immediately if you have a fever or new cough.



Are you thinking about having a baby?

Some RA medicines can cause serious birth defects. You should talk to your doctor before planning a pregnancy, whether you are a man or a woman.

How can you get the most out of your doctor's visit?

Getting ready for your doctor's visit.

- Bring all of your medicines to your doctor's visit.
 - Include vitamins, over-the-counter, and herbal medicines.

Write down all the questions you have for your doctor before the visit.

Make a list of your side effects from your medicines.

At your visit, it is important to tell your doctor about:

- Your list of questions
- Any pain
- Any stiffness (tightness in your joints)
- How well you sleep
- Your mood (how you feel)
- Your ability to do daily activities, like get dressed, cook, or bathe
- Problems getting or taking medicine
- Side effects from medicine
- Visits to the hospital, emergency room, or other doctors

Sharing this information will help you and your doctor make good decisions together.



Tell your doctor if you are pregnant or if you or your partner are planning a pregnancy.



“I feel really good because the doctor and I have a lot of dialogue. And the doctor always has answers to my questions. I have confidence in my doctor.”

- Eva, age 32

How can being active and eating well help your RA?

Being physically active may help your RA by reducing pain and improving physical function.

There are many different kinds of exercise that you can do to help your RA:

- Aerobic exercise, such as walking or dancing
- Strength training, such as lifting light weights
- Water exercise, such as swimming or special arthritis water exercise classes

In addition to doing exercise on your own, your doctor may send you to an occupational therapist or a physical therapist.

- Occupational therapists can give you advice on how to do everyday activities – such as dressing, cooking, and cleaning – with less pain.
- Physical therapists can help with joint function, strength and overall health. Therapists may use exercise, heat/cold, or massage to decrease pain and improve your ability to do everyday activities.

“You can look to other ways to making yourself feel better. I make myself exercise every day. Just being out in the morning helps me.”

- Ed, age 49



How can eating right help me?

People with RA are at higher risk for heart disease. Eating a healthy diet is one of the most important things to help you have a healthy heart and live longer.

What are some ways to eat healthy?

- Eat smaller portions
- Prepare food in healthy ways
- Eat more fruits and vegetables
- Get calcium and vitamin D from milk, yogurt, and leafy green vegetables.

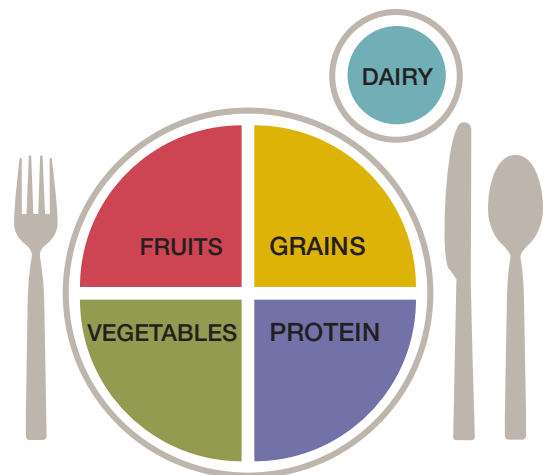
You do not have to be hungry or stop eating your favorite foods.

How can you benefit from healthy eating?










Healthy eating can:

- Give you more energy
- Help you lose weight
- Lower your blood pressure and cholesterol
- Lower your risk of having a heart attack
- Keep your bones healthy and strong












The healthy plate: Think of your plate in different sections. One half is for vegetables and fruits and the other half for proteins (such as meat, fish, eggs, or beans) and grains (such as pastas, breads, tortillas, or rice).













Additional information about RA medicines



 PILLS 	Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®)	Leflunomide (Arava®)	Methotrexate* (Rheumatrex® or Trexall®)	Sulfasalazine (Azulfidine®)
How often do you take it?	Once a day	Once a day	Once a week	Twice a day
Who cannot take medicines?		  	  	
Average price per month ^s	\$30-\$195	\$430-\$675	\$35-\$395	\$20-\$155
Common side effects	Stomach upset, diarrhea	Stomach upset, diarrhea, headache, rash, liver inflammation, cold symptoms		
Rare serious side effects (<1 out of 100)	Eye problem	Severe liver injury	Lung inflammation	Severe skin rash, low blood counts
Year FDA-approved for RA	1955	1998	1988	1996

*Also available as an injection.

 INJECTIONS  	Adalimumab (Humira®)	Certolizumab (Cimzia®)	Etanercept (Enbrel®)	Golimumab (Simponi®)
How often do you take it?	Every two weeks	Every two weeks	Once a week	Once a month
Who cannot take medicines?	 	 	 	 
Average price per month ^s	\$1,830	\$3,510	\$1,865	\$1,985
Common side effects	Redness or soreness where needle enters skin, stomach upset, headache, dizziness, high blood pressure			
Rare serious side effects (<1 out of 100)	Reactivation of TB, serious infection that needs antibiotic by vein in hospital, or cancer (most often skin or blood, like lymphoma)			
Year FDA-approved for RA	2002	2008	1998	2009

 INTRAVENOUS 	Abatacept* (Orencia®)	Infliximab (Remicade®)	Rituximab (Rituxan®)	Tocilizumab (Actemra®)
How often do you take it?	Every 4 weeks	Every 8 weeks	Twice within 2 weeks	Every 4 weeks
Who cannot take medicines?	 	 	 	 
Average price per month ^s	\$1,185-\$2,365	\$790-\$3,765	\$1,105	\$1,115-\$2,230
Common side effects	Reaction to infusion, stomach upset, headache, dizziness, high blood pressure			
Rare serious side effects (<1 out of 100)	Reactivation of TB, serious infection that needs antibiotic by vein in hospital, cancer (most often skin or blood, like lymphoma), or severe infusion reaction			
Year FDA-approved for RA	2005	1998	2006	2010

*Also available as an injection.

TB = Tuberculosis  = Known to cause birth defects  = Risk of birth defects unknown  = Can be harmful if you have liver disease

 = Do not combine with alcohol

 = Home

 = Doctor's office or hospital

^sPrices are based on the 2010 Drug Topics Red Book. Your actual cost will depend upon the dosage and your insurance.

My important contacts and phone numbers

Doctor: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Pharmacy: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Nurse or Interpreter: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Family Member: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Other: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____



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Where can you get more information about RA?

Ask your doctor if you have questions.

Here are some other sources of information:

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS)

<http://www.niams.nih.gov/>

- Fact sheets available in English, Chinese, Spanish
- Audio publications also in English, Chinese, Spanish

American College of Rheumatology website (under “Patient Resources”):

<http://www.rheumatology.org/>

- Information available in Spanish and English

Arthritis Foundation:

<http://www.arthritis.org>

- Information available in Spanish: <http://www.arthritis.org/español>

Where did the information in this guide come from?

This guide is adapted from *Rheumatoid Arthritis Medicines: A Guide for Adults*, produced in 2008 by the Eisenberg Center at Oregon Health & Science University with funding from the U.S. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). Researchers at the Eisenberg Center summarized research from 156 studies about medicines for RA. For an electronic copy of that guide in English, Spanish, or Chinese, visit: www.effectivehealthcare.ahrq.gov, or call the AHRQ Publications Clearinghouse: (800) 358-9295. Ask for AHRQ Publication Number 08-EHC004-2A.

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