

Benefits of early treatment of rheumatoid arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) can cause pain, physical disability, and other health problems if not treated.

Making an early diagnosis (6 months from when you first have symptoms of RA) offers the best results.

Early treatment with medicines can make you feel better and help slow or stop joint damage.

Your rheumatologist can help determine the best medicine for you and also help with other lifestyle changes to improve how you feel.



A plan known as **treat to target (T2T)** can help you control RA. This is when you and your doctor set goals for controlling RA and track your progress.

Treatment goals can be:

Remission

When you have no signs or symptoms of inflammatory (painful swelling) disease activity

Low disease activity

When you have very few symptoms and signs

There are different ways to measure RA disease activity. You and your doctor can discuss the best way to measure your disease activity.

Disease activity is measured on different schedules, usually every 3-6 months.

If your goals are not met, the dose of your medicines may need to be changed, or you may need to change or add medicines.

Common medicines used to treat RA

Disease Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drugs (DMARDs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The most common treatment Reduce inflammation and therefore help keep joint function (joints able to move properly) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Methotrexate, Hydroxychloroquine, Leflunomide, Sulfasalazine
Biologic therapies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Newer form of DMARDs which are made using molecular biology techniques These are often taken as injections (shots) or infusions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-TNF, Anti-IL-6, Anti-B-cell, Anti-T-cell
Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (NSAIDs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce pain and mild inflammation NSAIDs do not prevent joint damage Available as tablets or as topical (applied to your body like a lotion or gel) medicines <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ibuprofen, Naproxen, Meloxicam, Diclofenac
Corticosteroids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have strong anti-inflammatory effects and work quickly to reduce swelling These are used for a short time because they have many side effects Often used as tablets but in severe flares (when your symptoms get worse) can be given as injections or infusions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prednisone, methylprednisone Can also be used to inject joints (intra-articular joint injections) for flare up of symptoms
Analgesics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medicines that help relieve pain <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acetaminophen (Tylenol)

Non-medical ways to improve quality of life in RA:



Stay physically active and exercise regularly. Balance rest and activity- know your limits.

Stop smoking.



Make sure you get enough sleep. Learn relaxation techniques to reduce stress in your life.



Apply heat or cold or use a splint



Eat a balanced diet and maintain a healthy weight.

Connect with others: try joining a self-management education class. Ask for help!

