

Comorbidities in rheumatoid arthritis

- Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic, systemic autoimmune disease that primarily affects joints. If not adequately treated, RA is associated with poor quality of life, progressive disability and premature death. It is the most common inflammatory arthritis in adults.
- RA is often associated with extra articular manifestations.
- Early treatment of RA helps minimize joint damage and may also decrease risk for extra articular manifestations.

Cardiovascular disease

- Cardiovascular disease is the most serious comorbidity related to RA. Patients with RA are **twice as likely** to have an MI compared to the general population.
- DMARD and biologic therapies may reduce risk for cardiovascular disease, in some patients.
- Prednisone use is associated with an increased risk for heart disease.



Lung disease

- Lung involvement in RA can occur as bronchiectasis, obliterative bronchiolitis, pulmonary hypertension and interstitial lung disease.
- ILDs are the second cause of mortality in RA after cardiac disease.
- Regular assessment for smoking, cough and dyspnea and examination for nail clubbing and basal crackles.



RA and the risk for malignancy

- The risk of developing non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and lung cancer is greater in patients with RA than in individuals without the disease.
- Lymphoma and other malignancies have been observed in patients treated with various biologic agents.

Bone health/ Osteoporosis

- Osteoporosis and its clinical consequence, fractures, are well-known extra articular manifestations in RA.
- In both male and female RA populations, the prevalence of reduced bone density is reported to be double that of the background population.
- Patients with RA are at increased risk for both vertebral and non-vertebral fractures.



Depression

- Major depressive disorder is common in patients with RA and is estimated to be at least two to four-times that in the general population
- Depression affects patients with RA beyond the burden of mental illness itself. Patients with RA and comorbid depression have worse health outcomes.
- Depression in patients with RA is an independent risk factor for cardiovascular disease, suicidal ideation and death.
- Patients with RA and associated depression also have increased health service utilization and are less likely to be adherent with their medications.
- Depression may lead to unemployment, loss of work productivity and increased healthcare costs in persons with arthritis.

Eye disease

- Ocular manifestations are seen in up to 40% of patients with RA.
- Dry eye disease, episcleritis and scleritis are most common. Peripheral ulcerative keratitis (PUK) is rare but is potentially a sight-threatening manifestation.



Other organ systems

- GI – rare; dryness of mouth; gastric and duodenal ulcers
- Skin – rheumatoid nodules, vasculitis

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