

What are things to do when you are diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis?

Although there is no cure for rheumatoid arthritis (RA), new treatment plans and medicines for RA can help you better control your arthritis and help you keep up with a desired lifestyle. Early diagnosis and treatment are extremely important in being able to get good results in the long term.

Adjusting to a chronic condition (disease that lasts a long time) can take some time. The following tips may help you better manage your symptoms:

Learn about your arthritis

- Learn to be responsible for your own health and well-being. You can get support from others who help with your care.
- Do not be afraid to ask questions from your doctors and nurses.
- Learn which symptoms you have during flare of RA, and try to figure out how to recognize the early signs of a flare.
- Try to find what causes flares - it may be an increase in work load, stress, infections, or sometimes other medicines. It may not be possible to find a trigger for the flares.
- Learn about your medicines used to treat RA and how to best take them. It can take several weeks for some medicines to start working. Take your medications as instructed.
- Schedule regular visits with your rheumatologist and other doctors. This can help make sure that the disease is well-controlled and that the treatments are right for you.

Use reliable resources to gather information:

Contact your rheumatologist's office (585-486-0901) Monday-Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., or after regular work hours for urgent calls.

- Use **MyChart** for non-urgent questions.
- **The RA CHAMP program:** <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/medicine/allergy/patients-families/rheumatology-clinic/ra-champ-program.aspx>
- **The American College of Rheumatology:** <https://www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver/Patient-and-Caregiver-Resources>
- **The Arthritis Foundation:** <https://www.arthritis.org>
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):** <https://www.cdc.gov/arthritis>

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Make adjustments to your lifestyle.

Most people with RA will need to make some changes on how to do everyday tasks and to their lifestyle, to help better manage their condition.



Make sure you stay physically active. Make a regular exercise plan.



Change your diet to a healthy, balanced diet.



Set a goal for a healthy weight and work on maintaining that weight.



Smoking can make you more likely to get RA, make the symptoms worse, and make the medicines less effective.



Make sure to get enough rest and sleep. You may need to rest more during flares.



Use assistive devices (such as can openers, thick pens, a cane, or a walker).



Make sure you are mentally active, too. Find your support system of family and friends and stay in touch.

Emotional needs:

It is normal to experience emotional and mental stress when facing a chronic illness such as RA.

- It can be hard to deal with the unpredictable nature of RA. Many people with RA are likely to have a variety of feelings (such as frustration, fear, anger, and resentment).

Finding support can help.

- Being part of support groups that include others with RA can help provide emotional support and give you a better understanding of RA.
- Surround yourself with people who support, respect, and encourage you.

Depression is common in RA.

- Learn the symptoms (such as feeling tired all the time, not feeling hungry, or difficulty sleeping).
- Get help from a professional if needed.

Focus on the positives and celebrate successes.

- Appreciate yourself as a person.
- Focus on things that make you feel good.
- Learn to advocate for yourself.

