

Medication adherence in rheumatoid arthritis

- Many patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) report that taking medications as prescribed by their health care provider can be difficult.
- Not taking medications as prescribed however, can result in poor control of inflammatory disease leading to ongoing symptoms, progression of disease and consequently a risk for joint damage and disability.

When not taking your medication as prescribed you are more likely to have

- More pain
- More fatigue
- Depression
- Less ability to function
- Lower quality of life measures
- Lower physical activity



Medication adherence

- Medication adherence is the extent to which patients take medicines as prescribed.

Non-adherence can occur in different ways

- Not filling the prescription or starting the medication
- Taking an incorrect dose (more than or less than) or at the wrong times
- Stopping the medication without discussing with their healthcare provider



- More than 1 in 5 prescriptions go unfilled in the United States.
- About 50% of people taking medications for a chronic illness stop taking these medications within the first year

What can you do to improve adherence

- **Understand why you need the medication**

- Get to know your disease and how the medication will help you.
- Use reliable resources to learn about possible side effects – see below for resources (remember that not everyone gets all possible side effects).



- **Understand how to take the medication** – (how often, with meals or on empty stomach)

- **Find ways to help remember to take the medication at the prescribed times**

- Consider a pillbox to help organize your medications by day and time.
- Use electronic devices such as your phone to remind you.
- Time your medicine with your daily activities such as brushing teeth.

- **Get help**

- Ask a family member or friend to help organize your medications.
- Join a support group (discuss information with your healthcare provider).

- **Ask about medication forms that might be better for you**

- By mouth (tablets, capsules, liquids), injections (under the skin, in the muscle or joint) or intravenously (some options may not be available for certain medications or because of insurance coverage).

- **Cost**

- If you unable to afford medications check with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about programs that may help offset the cost.
- You may also be able to get alternative medications that are affordable.

- **If your feel that the medication is not working**

- It may be due to severity of your arthritis; you may need higher doses, additional medications or possibly a different medication.
- Your symptoms may be due to a different medical problem.

- **Other important things**

- Keep to scheduled office visits with your healthcare provider and with laboratory tests that are needed to monitor for benefits and side effects of the medication.
- Make sure to keep an updated list of your medications and allergies and tell your doctor about any changes.
- Be sure to inform your doctor if you are pregnant, plan to get pregnant or are breast feeding.



Ask your healthcare provider, nurse or pharmacist

Use MyChart for non-urgent questions

Additional information is available at the following websites

- The American College of Rheumatology <https://www.rheumatology.org/I-Am-A/Patient-Caregiver/Patient-and-Caregiver-Resources>
- The RA CHAMP website <https://www.urmc.rochester.edu/medicine/allergy/patients-families/rheumatology-clinic/ra-champ-program.aspx>
- The Arthritis Foundation <https://www.arthritis.org>