

> What is Rheumatoid Arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a long term condition that causes pain, swelling and stiffness in the joints.

> What are the symptoms?

The symptoms usually affect the hands, feet and wrists and include:

Pain - Joint pain associated with rheumatoid arthritis is usually throbbing and aching pain which is often worse in the morning and after a period of inactivity.

Joint stiffness especially in the morning. For example, you may not be able to bend your fingers fully if your hands are affected. Joint stiffness is more severe in the morning and may last longer.

Swelling, warmth and redness: The lining of joints affected become inflamed causing the joints to swell, become hot and tender to touch.

Other symptoms may include:

- Tiredness and lack of energy
- A high temperature (fever)
- Sweating
- Weight loss
- Poor appetite

> What are the causes?

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease. This means your immune system which usually fights infection attacks the cells that line your joints by mistake. This can make the joints to become swollen, stiff and painful. Over time, this can damage the joint itself, the cartilage and nearby bone.

It's not clear what triggers this problem with the immune system, although there are a number of things that increase your risk of rheumatoid arthritis including:

- **Your genes** – the condition may be due to inherited genes although this is rare
- **Hormones** – the condition is more common in women than men. This may be due to the effect of the hormone oestrogen
- **Smoking** – people who smoke are at increased risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis

> What about treatment?

Treatment is designed to reduce joint, relieve pain, prevent or slow joint damage, reduce disability and enable you to live an active life.

Options include:

- Medication to relieve symptoms and slow disease progression
- Physiotherapy and occupational therapy to help keep you mobile
- Surgery to correct any joint problems that develop

References:

NHS Choices: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/complications/>

NICE: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg79/chapter/Recommendations>

Self Care Tips

- Have your yearly flu jab to protect against flu.
- Have a pneumococcal vaccination, a one-off injection to protect against a specific serious chest infection called pneumococcal pneumonia.
- Eat a healthy balanced diet.
- Exercise regularly. Exercise helps relieve stress, keeps your joints mobile and strengthen the muscles supporting your joints.
- Maintain a healthy weight - being overweight puts extra strain on your joints – regular exercise will help you maintain a healthy weight.

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To contact Bromley Well call the Single Point of Access on **0300 3309 039** or Lifestyle Support on **07985 444210 / 07985 433045** Email enquiry@bromleywell.org.uk www.bromleywell.org.uk



> Related resources and services

Arthritis Research UK Help Line: 0800 5200 520 www.arthritisresearchuk.org	A National charity providing information on the latest research into arthritis and tips and advice on managing the condition.
Arthritis Action Helpline: 0800 652 3188 www.arthritisaction.org.uk	A National charity offering healthy eating advice, physical therapies, exercise tips and pain management techniques.
NHS Conditions Arthritis	NHS conditions pages contain information about the causes, symptoms and treatment of arthritis and advice for people living with the condition.
Connect Well Bromley / Arthritis	Local support for people living with arthritis.
British Association of Dietitians Factsheet	The Association of UK Dietitians food fact sheets containing diet advice for people living with arthritis and tips for managing the condition.