



RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

Bromley

Well

HEALTH FACT SHEET

Updated December 2025

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 that can be worse in the morning and after inactivity.

Joint stiffness – especially in the morning. E.g. you may not be able to bend your fingers fully if your hands are affected.

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

SELF CARE TIPS

USE HOT AND COLD THERAPY TO HELP WITH PAIN

Using heat can help with relaxation and soothing pain in general. Some people also find that applying cold to areas of pain can help.



To register with Bromley Well:
Freephone 0808 278 7898
Or register online:
www.bromleywell.org.uk/refer

Contact Lifestyle Support direct
07985 431484 / 07985 444210
or email
enquiry@bromleywell.org.uk



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 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, but your risk is increased by:

- 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 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.
- Managing lifestyle factors such as stress, nutrition and sleep can help to reduce symptoms/flares.

SELF CARE TIPS

BE OPEN TO USING AIDS

There are a lot of aids out there that can help day to day life easier for those with rheumatoid arthritis. Gadgets to help open jars, different size pens and other adapted utensils can all be discussed with an occupational therapist.

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Some myths

Myth 1: Rheumatoid arthritis is just 'wear and tear' so all older people will get it.

Incorrect! Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune condition where the body mistakenly attacks the joints. Therefore, although older people can develop rheumatoid arthritis, this is not due to their age. Most people who have rheumatoid arthritis actually get diagnosed between 30–60. However, there are other types of arthritis, such as osteoarthritis, that are caused by wear and tear.

Myth 2: Exercise can be dangerous for rheumatoid arthritis.

This is not true. It is actually very important to continue to have an exercise routine when you have arthritis. Ensuring that you have a variety of movement, including stretching, contributes to your overall health, and the health of your joints. It also reduces the risk of losing muscle mass that helps hold your joints in place. However, it may be wise to consult a physiotherapist for help with recognising when you do need to rest to avoid overexercising.

SELF CARE TIPS

KEEPING ACTIVE

Keeping physically active can help manage your symptoms, including pain. Try to focus on low-impact activities like swimming, walking, gentle cycling and aqua aerobics. These activities generally put less strain on your joints.



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FURTHER RESOURCES

Versus Arthritis

Help Line: 0800 5200 520

www.arthritis-uk.org/

A National charity providing information on the latest research into arthritis and tips and advice on managing the condition.

Arthritis Action

Help Line: 0800 652 3188/020 3781 7120

www.arthritisaction.org.uk/

A National charity offering healthy eating advice, physical therapies, exercise tips and pain management techniques.

NHS Conditions Arthritis

www.nhs.uk/conditions/arthritis/

NHS conditions pages contain information about the causes, symptoms and treatment of arthritis and advice for people living with the condition.

British Association of Dieticians Factsheets

www.bda.uk.com/resource/rheumatoid-arthritis-diet.html

The Association of UK Dietitians food fact sheets containing diet advice for people living with arthritis and tips for managing the condition.

References: NHS conditions www.nhs.uk/conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/ NICE www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng100
Arthritis UK: www.arthritis-uk.org/information-and-support/understanding-arthritis/conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/

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