

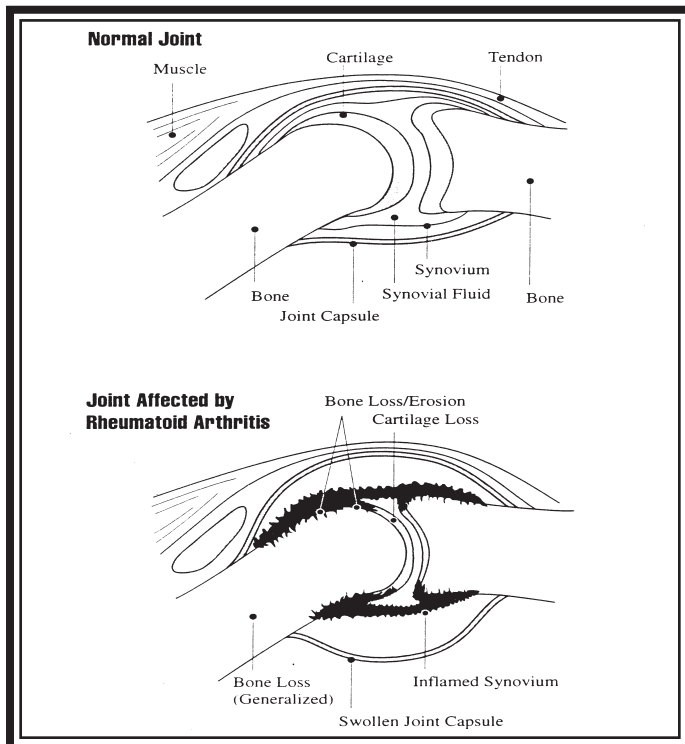
RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

WHAT IS RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS?

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease. The body's immune system attacks healthy tissue lining the joints. The joint lining becomes irritated. This causes pain, swelling, stiffness, and less range of motion. It can also destroy the joint. Symptoms vary from person to person.

RA is one of the most common forms of arthritis. It is a chronic and painful condition. Early diagnosis and treatment are important. If it is not recognized and managed early, permanent joint damage often occurs. In many cases, RA can limit a person's ability to carry out normal daily activities. This may include cooking, getting dressed, or driving a car.

RA can be difficult to diagnose in its early stages. The doctor will take a complete medical history, perform a medical exam, and order a series of blood tests and/or x-rays.



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Arthritis

ARTHRITIS
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WARNING SIGNS

- Tender, warm, swollen joints
- Equal (symmetrical) pattern. For example, if one knee is affected, the other one is also.
- Joint swelling often affecting the wrist and finger joints closest to the hand. Other affected joints can include those of the neck, shoulders, elbows, hips, knees, ankles, and feet.
- Feeling tired or weak, occasional fever, and a general sense of not feeling well (malaise).
- Pain and stiffness lasting for more than 30 minutes in the morning or after a long rest.
- Symptoms can last for many years.
- Symptoms in other parts of the body besides the joints.

TREATMENT

There is no cure for RA. Early diagnosis and treatment are key to managing this condition. Doctors use a variety of methods to treat RA. This may include medicine, exercise, rest, joint protection, physical and occupational therapy and even surgery.

While nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, analgesics, and corticosteroids can help symptoms, there is now a group of medicines called disease-modifying drugs that are shown to slow or stop joint destruction. Arthritis specialists generally prescribe these medicines. Early use of disease modifying drugs can dramatically change the course of rheumatoid arthritis. Surgery may be recommended for severely damaged joints.

For more information contact:
Missouri Arthritis & Osteoporosis
Program: 1-800-316-0935 or
Arthritis Foundation: 1-800-283-7800