

Reactive Arthritis

www.arthritis.org.nz



**ARTHRITIS
NEW ZEALAND**

KAIPONAPONA AOTEAROA

*Improving the lives of
people affected by arthritis*

*Te whai kia pai ake te hunga
kua pāngia e te kaiponapona*

Did you know?

- Reactive arthritis is a painful form of **inflammatory arthritis**
- It is most common in men **20 to 50 years**
- Reactive arthritis is often the result of an infection such as **food poisoning**
- It **frequently** goes away on its own

By working with your doctor, specialist occupational therapist and Arthritis New Zealand you can find ways to protect your joints. That might sound like a lot of people but you will need them all. Look on them as a team.

This booklet will help you get started. In here you will find answers to the following:

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What is reactive arthritis?

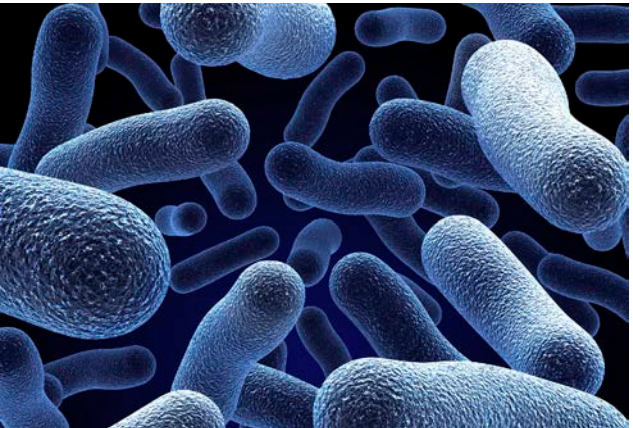
It's perhaps not all that well known that you can get arthritis as the result of having an infection.

One form of arthritis is called reactive arthritis.

You might suspect you've got a problem when your joints, especially your knees, ankles or toes, start to swell and become painful shortly after you've suffered an infection.

The type of infection you will have had will probably have been bacterial, and will have affected your urinary system or your stomach and bowel.

So if you've had an infection caused by chlamydia in the penis, vagina, bladder or urethra, you could potentially get the symptoms of reactive arthritis shortly after. Similarly, if you've had a major upset to the stomach or bowel, a few weeks later you may begin to feel the symptoms of reactive arthritis.

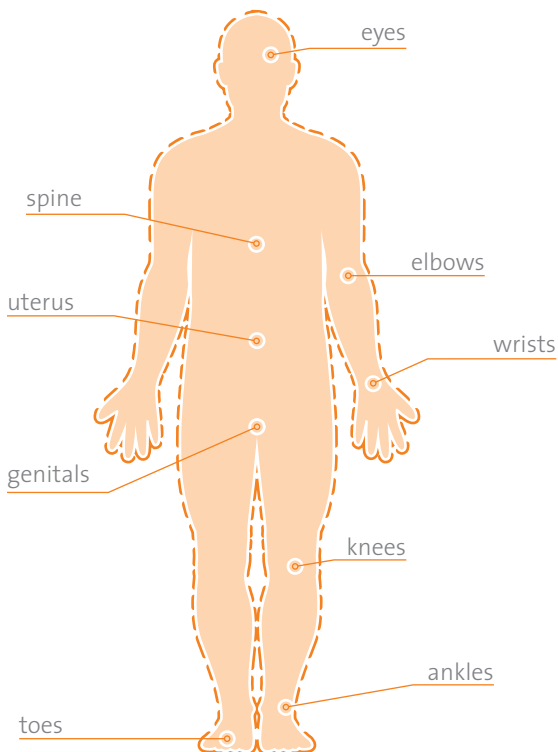


What are symptoms of reactive arthritis?

As well as affecting the joints of the knees, ankles or toes, reactive arthritis can attack the wrists, elbows and spine, as well as tendons around joints such as the Achilles tendon in the heel.

The condition will typically go on to inflame the urethra in men, and the vagina, urethra and uterus in women. Men may experience an urgency to pee and have a fluid discharge from the penis. In both sexes, a burning sensation may be felt when urinating.

A side effect of reactive arthritis may be an irritation in the eyes, causing redness and possibly blurred vision.



What causes reactive arthritis?

The bacteria that cause reactive arthritis are very common. Anyone who becomes infected with these germs might develop reactive arthritis. Yet very few people with bacterial diarrhoea actually go on to have serious reactive arthritis.

Who gets reactive arthritis?

Reactive arthritis tends to occur most often in men between the ages of 20 – 50.



Is it really arthritis?

If all this doesn't sound like arthritis the way you have always understood the term, let us assure you that it is. A condition that affects the joints and ligaments causing pain and swelling is commonly classified as arthritis, which is our speciality.

If you get reactive arthritis, then it's not the end of the world. Reactive arthritis is likely to pass with time.

How is it diagnosed and treated?

How is reactive arthritis diagnosed?

Diagnosis is largely based on symptoms of the infections and appearance of typical joint and muscle involvement. Doctors may order a test for the HLA-B27 gene.

How is reactive arthritis treated?

Treatment will depend on what stage the diagnosis is at.

For early stage the inflammation can be treated with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) to reduce joint pain and inflammation.

Treatment for later stage may require a disease-modifying drug (DMARD).

How long does reactive arthritis last?

The symptoms usually last 3-12 months, however a small percentage of individuals may experience a recurrence of symptoms and development of a long-term condition.



Looking after yourself:

Living and coping with a chronic condition can be difficult. But meanwhile we can suggest ways to make it easier to live with:

- **Talk about it** – talking about how you feel is very important.
- **Include your doctor** – always combine our advice with that of your doctor.
- **Manage your pain** – ask for our brochure called “Managing your Pain”. To do that, call 0800 663 463. The call is free.
- **Give us a call** – if you would like to talk to one of our Arthritis Educators personally, you’re welcome. Just ask for them when you call our 0800 number.

For more information:

To request a brochure and learn more about successful living with arthritis, go to:
www.arthritis.org.nz



Where can I learn more?

www.arthritis.org.nz

Regional offices

Northern (Auckland) 09 523 8900

Midland/Central (Wellington) 04 472 1427

Southern (Christchurch) 03 366 8383

National office

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