

# What Is Rheumatoid Arthritis? (RA)



Rheumatoid Arthritis is a common inflammatory form of arthritis that causes painful, stiff, swollen joints. Instead of protecting the body from infection the immune system attacks healthy tissue causing inflammation and joint damage. As an autoimmune disease, RA can also affect other parts of the body.

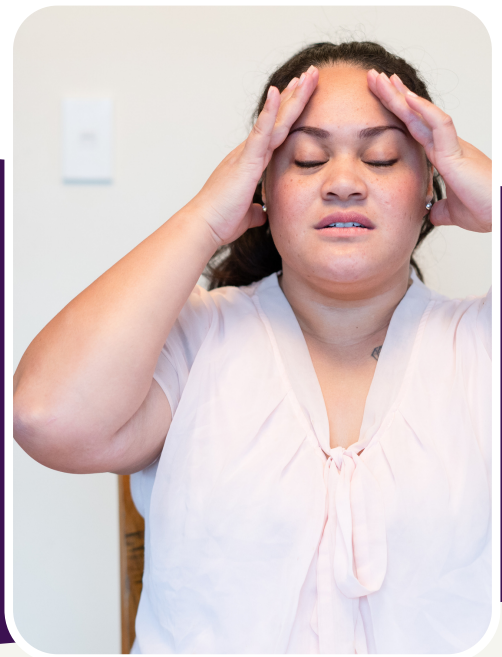
## Who Gets Rheumatoid Arthritis?

- RA affects women three times more often than men
- Most common between the ages of 25-50

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can vary and can come and go but often include:

- Joint Pain
- Joint Swelling
- Stiffness
- Fatigue
- Feeling low
- Depressed



## How is it diagnosed?

- Medical History
- Physical Examination
- Blood Tests
- X rays and other imaging may be used
- If your doctor suspects RA you should be referred to a Rheumatologist



# Medical Management

- Diagnosis
- Monitoring
- Medications may include-Nonsteroidal Ant inflammatory drugs (NSAIDS) Disease-Modifying Drugs (DMARDS) Biological Therapies (Biologics)



## How can I help myself?



The pain and unpredictable nature of RA can be hard on people mentally and emotionally. It is natural to feel scared, sad and angry. Acknowledging your feelings and seeking support is important for you health and wellbeing.

Lifestyle choices are an important part of managing symptoms, improving wellbeing and reducing flares including:

- no smoking
- managing stress and fatigue
- joint protection
- healthy activity
- nutrition

## Questions you can ask your Rheumatologist & GP

- How can I keep track of the blood test results used to monitor my RA?
- How will I know if the medication is working, and how long does this take?
- What are the possible side effects and how often will they occur?
- What should I do to minimise the chance of side effects?
- Whom do I contact if I have concerns about the medication?
- Are there medications that I should stop now that I am beginning this new treatment?
- Who should I contact – and how quickly – if I have a 'flare'?

### For more information:



[arthritis.org.nz](http://arthritis.org.nz)



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