

Rheumatoid Disease Factsheet from RAWarrior.com

Rheumatoid Disease (RD) or Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA), affects about one percent of the population worldwide, indicating there may be 3 million affected in the U.S.^{1,2,3} Seventy-five to eighty percent are female.^{4,5,6} Frequently, people are diagnosed in their late 30's to mid-40's; however one can be diagnosed with Rheumatoid Arthritis at any age.^{7,8}

IS RHEUMATOID DISEASE A SERIOUS ILLNESS?

RD is a serious diagnosis comparable to Type 1 diabetes or Multiple sclerosis. RD significantly affects mortality and usually requires lifelong medical treatment by various specialists. Joint inflammation (arthritis) is one obvious symptom of RD, but it is a systemic illness related to immune function, and can affect any part of the body. The disease can cause problems with various organs or systems, including the circulatory or nervous systems, eyes, skin, heart, or lungs.^{9,10,11,12} As expert rheumatologist Joan Bathon points out, "It can be in all your tissues, causing problems wherever inflammation occurs."¹³ People living with Rheumatoid Disease (PRD) often have numerous hospitalizations or surgeries, and can become physically disabled.

THERE IS NO KNOWN CURE FOR RD

Although the world is full of so-called cures, handed down through antiquity, there is none proven. Friends often prescribe juices or Tylenol Arthritis for RD. There are good reasons an actual cure is difficult: It is a very complex disease that is heterogeneous, and can even change over time in the same patient. It could be compared to trying to cure a virus that mutates. However, research is severely underfunded in the U.S., with per-patient research spending about one-twelfth of similar diseases or those with comparable impact. The American College of Rheumatology found in 2007 "research funding for RA averages as little as \$25.90 per patient and remains significantly low compared to other chronic diseases that affect far fewer people like lupus, diabetes and multiple sclerosis, which average \$330.00 per patient."¹⁴ In subsequent years, the Rheumatoid Patient Foundation (RPF) analyzed National Institutes of Health (NIH) funding with similar results.

WHAT IS RD LIKE?

Common symptoms include joint pain, fatigue, fevers, stiffness, hoarseness, eye dryness, and feeling unwell; however, symptoms vary significantly. Although some PRD have a milder course of the disease, they may yet experience regular doctor visits, expensive medications, side effects, and some physical limitations. Many people with severe RD experience disability, damage, or deformity even early in the disease. Most PRD are somewhere in the middle. RD symptoms improve and worsen alternately in some patients in a pattern called "flares," making it difficult to predict how physically disabled a PRD will be at any particular time, which can be a source of frustration. Others experience more constant disease activity. RD almost always progresses, becoming more severe over time, but remissions are also possible. Because impairment is often not visible to casual observers, it can be challenging for PRD to obtain physical assistance or exceptions that they require.

WHAT KIND OF MEDICINES DO PEOPLE TAKE FOR RD?

Most PRD take 2 kinds of medicine: 1) to reduce disease activity, and 2) to reduce symptoms. PRD are usually prescribed disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs or DMARDs that suppress aspects of the immune system. Still, most experience frequent or severe symptoms that require anti-inflammatory or pain relieving medication.^{15,16} RD can cause severe pain akin to a broken bone or other acute injury. Often, the medicines produce side effects like nausea, weight gain, or increased difficulty fighting infection.

WHAT CAN OTHERS DO TO HELP THOSE LIVING WITH RD?

Many simple things can be done to improve the lives of people living with RD. You can learn about RD & help spread awareness about the disease or donate to the RPF at <http://rheum4us.org>. Those who are more educated about RD are less likely to hurt someone's hand¹⁷ or make insensitive comments.¹⁸ You could avoid exposing PRD to germs since infections are a danger and ask about other ways to help such as providing physical assistance.

For help or more info on RD, see rawarrior.com or rheum4us.org.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Hospital for Special Surgery. Hospital for Special Surgery receives grant for new genomics center to study autoimmune diseases. 2013 Apr 25 [cited 2013 May 16]. Available from: http://www.hss.edu/newsroom_genomics-center-study-autoimmune-diseases.asp
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- ³ Australian Government. A snapshot of rheumatoid arthritis; report 116. 2013 May [cited 2013 Jun 1]. Available from: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129543377>
- ⁴ (Roughly 75 percent are female.) Rheumatoid arthritis treatment and symptoms. Brigham and Woman's Hospital [Internet]. 2013 Apr 22. [cited 2013 Jun 1]. Available from: http://www.brighamandwomens.org/Departments_and_Services/medicine/services/rheumatology/Services/arthritis/Services/rheumatoid.aspx
- ⁵ (Of 6004 RA patients, 79% were female.) Sokka T, Toloza S, Cutolo M, Kautiainen H, Makinen H, Gogus F, Skakic V, Badsha H, Peets T, Baranauskaite A, et.al. Women, men, and rheumatoid arthritis: analyses of disease activity, disease characteristics, and treatments in the QUEST-RA Study. *Arthritis Res Ther* [Internet]. 2009 Jan 14 [cited 2013 Jun 1];11:R7. Available from: <http://arthritis-research.com/content/pdf/ar2591.pdf>
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- ⁷ Rheumatoid Arthritis. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [Internet]. 2012 Nov 19 [cited 2013 May 28]. Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/arthritis/basics/rheumatoid.htm>
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- ⁹ McInnes IB, Schett G. The pathogenesis of rheumatoid arthritis. *New Engl J Med* [Internet]. 2011 Dec 8 [cited 2013 Jan 24]; 365:2205-2219. Available from: <http://www.nejm.org/doi/pdf/10.1056/NEJMra1004965> doi: 10.1056/NEJMra1004965
- ¹⁰ Martinez J. Doctor, patients: rheumatoid arthritis is far more than joint pain. Southern California Public Radio blogs. 2013 Feb 4 [cited 2013 May 28]. Available from: <http://www.scpr.org/blogs/southla/2013/02/04/12345/doctor-patients-rheumatoid-arthritis-far-more-join/>
- ¹¹ Young, K. Preclinical rheumatoid disease: there are no joints in the lungs. Rheumatoid Arthritis Warrior [Internet]. 2012 Mar 18 [cited 2013 May 28]. Available from: <http://rawarrior.com/preclinical-rheumatoid-disease-there-are-no-joints-in-the-lungs/>
- ¹² Young, K. Where the Rubber Meets the Road or What If Only the Cancer in Dave's Kidneys Was Treated? Rheumatoid Arthritis Warrior [Internet]. 2013 Mar 11 [cited 2013 May 28]. Available from: <http://rawarrior.com/where-the-rubber-meets-the-road-or-what-if-only-the-cancer-in-daves-kidneys-was-treated/>
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