

## Pay Attention to Those Rheumatoid Arthritis Symptoms!

Rheumatoid arthritis is one of the most common variations of arthritis, and it usually affects those between the ages of 25 and 55, most of them women. It's an autoimmune and systemic disease that gives rise to many rheumatoid arthritis symptoms and signs. The most overriding of all these symptoms is the unremitting pain and discomfort that sufferers experience on a regular basis, and which most often restrict their ability to move about freely and adversely affect their quality of life.

Rheumatoid arthritis symptoms usually manifest themselves in the small joints of the feet and fingers, although they can appear in joints in other locations as well, such as the hips and knees. In autoimmune diseases like rheumatoid arthritis, the immune system misfires and turns on healthy cells and tissues -- in this case, the synovium or the lining of the joints. Pain and inflammation are the most prominent results of this "friendly fire" by the immune system.

The majority of patients awake to stiff and painful joints in the morning, which can last for an hour or more. A long period of inactivity or rest can also trigger this pain and stiffness. The disease usually affects more than just one joint and appears bilaterally or symmetrically. That is, a person can experience symptoms in the fingers of both her left and right hands or the toes of both her left and right feet. It becomes harder to move the affected joint in its full range of motion, and even the least amount of pressure on it can cause a lot of pain. Also, the skin covering the joint can become red and inflamed, and at times the patient can feel either a tingling sensation or numbness in her skin. A low-grade fever is common among sufferers of this disease.

Small nodules or 'tophi' appear under the skin of about 25 percent of people with the disease. These lumps and bumps are about the size of a pea and are usually painless. They are the results of inflammation and scar tissue, and can appear in areas such as the arms, ankles, and elbows. Even though the tophi are not painful, they should not be dismissed because they could indicate other, more serious conditions than rheumatoid arthritis.

Rheumatoid arthritis is a systemic disease, meaning it affects not just the joints but many other parts of the body as well. Inflammation can occur in the lungs, giving rise to a condition called pleurisy. Inflammation of glands in the mouth and in the eyes can cause mouth dryness and eye irritation, also called Sjogren's syndrome. Inflammation can also occur (though quite rarely) in the blood vessels and the pericardium, or the membrane enclosing the heart. Another complication of rheumatoid arthritis is anemia, where the bone marrow is unable to produce the adequate amount of red blood cells needed to keep it healthy.

The disease does not only affect the body, many of the symptoms manifest themselves in psychological ways as well. For instance, patients complain of a feeling of listlessness or an overall feeling of not being well. This condition is also known by the term malaise. Getting tired easily, a feeling of fatigue, loss of appetite, and weight loss -- these are all rheumatoid arthritis symptoms and contribute greatly to the patient's perception of a reduction in her quality of life.

It is important to remember that no two persons will have exactly the same symptoms. Just as each person's bodily make-up and metabolisms are different, so too will rheumatoid arthritis symptoms will become manifest in each individual. Some men and women experience sudden flare-ups of the disease, with the symptoms disappearing after several days or weeks while others will experience continuous pain and swelling for several years. Aside from the constant pain, long-term rheumatoid arthritis that is left untreated will lead to gross deformities and permanent joint damage.

Knowing about the various rheumatoid arthritis symptoms will help each person be aware of what to look out for, especially if she is already predisposed to the disease. It will save the trouble and expense that could result from misdiagnosis and guesswork. A person who presents with one or more of these symptoms should seek immediate medical attention so that the progress of the disease can be slowed down or even halted at the earliest possible time.

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### About the Author

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