

Rheumatoid Arthritis & Gout

What is Arthritis?

The word arthritis means inflammation of a joint. There are many different types of arthritis of which the most common are **Osteoarthritis (OA)** and **Rheumatoid arthritis (Rh.A)**. It is important that the distinction between these two conditions is understood, as the treatment and prognosis for each are very different.

Osteoarthritis is a degenerative condition in which the smooth lining of the joint surfaces flakes or cracks and wears away. This can lead to an inflammation of the whole joint.
(SEE LEAFLET TITLED OSTEOARTHRITIS)

Rheumatoid arthritis however is primarily an inflammation of the synovial membrane covering the joint. (This membrane is responsible for secreting the fluids that lubricate the joint in normal use). Sufferers of Rheumatoid Arthritis are often left with the condition of Osteoarthritis when their other symptoms subside.

How can I tell if I have Rheumatoid arthritis?

Rh.A tends to be symmetrical - affecting both knees, wrists, hands or shoulders etc. and often arrives suddenly with several painful, "hot" and swollen joints. Mornings stiffness can be severe and lasts longer than with OA.

You may also feel generally unwell with "flu type" symptoms, loss of appetite, achey muscles, and dry or red eyes.

Rh.A can occur at any age and is more commonly found in women than in men. The diagnosis is not always obvious at first and it may be some time before the symptoms sufficiently manifest themselves to suggest the problem.

The only way to be sure that you have Rh.A is to have a blood test, so a visit to the G.P. may be advisable.

What are the causes of Rh.A?

The causes are not yet fully understood; we know that the disease involves a breakdown of the auto immune system, so there may be an inherited predisposition or possibly an inherited susceptibility to viral attack. Hopefully, research will soon answer this question.

So can arthritis be cured?

Not Really.....To cure means to restore to 'perfect' condition as before the problem and I am afraid this is not possible.

Can my Rh.A be treated?

Physical treatment is not recommended for sufferers of Rh.A when the 'disease' is in its 'active phase'. However, after the acute inflammatory processes have died down, treatment may be considered for the residual

stiffness and to help reduce permanent loss of mobility.

Osteopathic treatment for an Rh.A sufferer during the 'inactive phases' is aimed at improving the range of pain free movement, so that the problem will be less noticeable and life more normal. In many cases the pain is exacerbated by tight muscles surrounding the affected joints, and reducing this tightness can substantially relieve the discomfort.

Another aim of treatment is to strengthen the muscles around the joint to afford better support for the future.

Your Doctor will prescribe anti-inflammatory drugs which will help the symptoms, but you should also consider other forms of help for this, such as Acupuncture or Homeopathy, which may be helpful.

Why am I worse in wet weather?

It is thought that the reduction in barometric air pressure is responsible for increased joint pain. Possibly because the fluid pressure inside the joints is temporarily higher than the surrounding air pressure, so they become slightly more swollen.

Another factor is that you may feel generally less cheerful on wet and windy days and so be less able to ignore the usual amount of discomfort.

How can I help myself?

Don't ignore your pain!!

Slow down or rest, especially if the pain persists for more than an hour after activity or if an affected joint swells up. If you try to do too much you'll end up having to rest for longer! (Fatigue is one of the symptoms of chronic arthritis).

Severe pain after activity may be helped by the application of an ice pack; wrap in a damp cloth and apply several times for a few minutes each time. On the other hand, mild stiffness after rest may be relieved by warmth.

Gentle non-weight-bearing exercise is helpful and might include hydrotherapy. The exact nature of exercise required depends on your age, condition and which areas are affected - ask for advice.

Is there a dietary link?

Obviously the better health you have the better your body can cope with any disorder, so a good diet is important. There is no evidence that diet plays any part in causing Arthritis but if you are overweight there will be more strain on your joints (especially of the back and lower limbs). Many sufferers have reported an improvement in their condition if they avoid certain foods. Others report no change, so this is inconclusive. Many books are available on this subject and could be worth reading.

Should I take vitamins?

Again - good nutrition helps you to cope better. Every patent remedy for arthritis has helped some people, (Cod liver oil which contains vitamin D and helps you to absorb calcium is an old favorite, and Glucosamine has proved effective) but none of them help everyone. It

depends on your personal deficiencies - ask your therapist, chemist, or health food shop.

Do copper bracelets help?

There is no scientific evidence whatsoever that wearing a copper (or magnetic) bracelet helps arthritic sufferers. However, a great many people swear that it helps; it can't do any harm and may encourage sympathy from others.

Does it help to 'rub something in'?

There are some modern anti-inflammatory and pain relieving creams which some patients find give temporary relief - ask your chemist for advice (do not use these if you suffer from asthma).

There are also a great many 'warming' rubs that some people swear by. These act as a "counter irritant" in the same way as the application of heat or cold to the area, i.e. they send messages of warm or cold along the nerves from the affected part to the brain and this 'blocks out' some of the pain signals.

What is gout?

Gout is a form of arthritis characterised by the sudden appearance of an acutely painful red swelling. Often occurring in the big toe, it can also affect other areas such as the elbow, knee or ankle, and is found mainly in the middle aged or elderly, especially men. The inflammation in this case is due to the presence of urate crystals. A tendency to form these crystals is usually inherited, but an attack can be triggered by a strict weight loss diet or by taking diuretic tablets for another complaint such as high blood pressure.

Your doctor can take a blood sample to test whether you have gout and modern medication can control the problem **But you should still try to help yourself.**

Incomplete purine metabolism is the basic cause, so diet is very important. An enzyme found in cherries helps to digest these purines so it could be worth eating up to 1/2 lb per day. Blueberries, pineapple, pomegranates and other juices with high levels of flavonoids also help to reduce uric acid levels

You should try to avoid eating the following:- Meat extracts, liver, kidneys, pate, gravy, yeast(marmite), anchovies, herrings, sardines, shellfish, cheese(stilton & brie) and porridge.

Drink plenty of water as this can help to avoid the common complication of kidney stones. Eat lots of fresh vegetables, including celery and take a multivitamin tablets that contains vitamin B5.

For more info try: www.Ukgoutsociety.org