



Talking with others about  
your rheumatoid arthritis





## Talking about RA is important

Having a long-lasting condition like rheumatoid arthritis (RA) can affect you in many ways.

You may have joint pain, stiffness, or tiredness. These symptoms may keep you from doing daily tasks. They may get worse when you try to do too much.

You may also worry about the emotional effects of RA. Accepting the help of others and telling them how they can help you will be important.

## Starting the conversation

You may not feel comfortable talking about your RA with others, especially if you need to ask for their help.

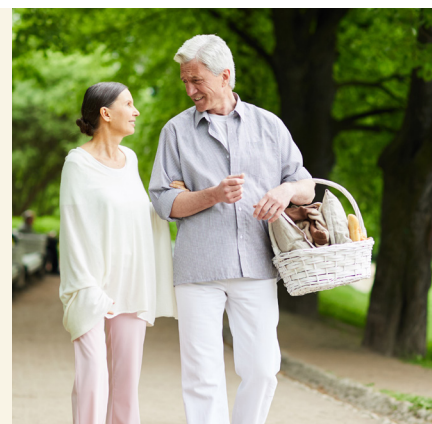
However, sharing information about your condition and your needs can be beneficial. It may help you reduce stress and manage negative emotions. Being open may also make it easier for you to ask for help when you need it.





# Talking about your RA

Your family and friends can be a source of emotional and physical support. Sharing information about RA and how it affects you will help them understand what you are going through. **Talking with others about your condition will also help them understand how they can help.**



- Talk about your emotions and symptoms. Describe your symptoms in terms that people can relate to, such as “I am so tired. I feel like I’ve been up for 24 hours.”
- Invite a friend or family member to come with you to your healthcare visits. This may help him or her better understand RA.
- Make a list of tasks you need help with, and create a plan for others to help.



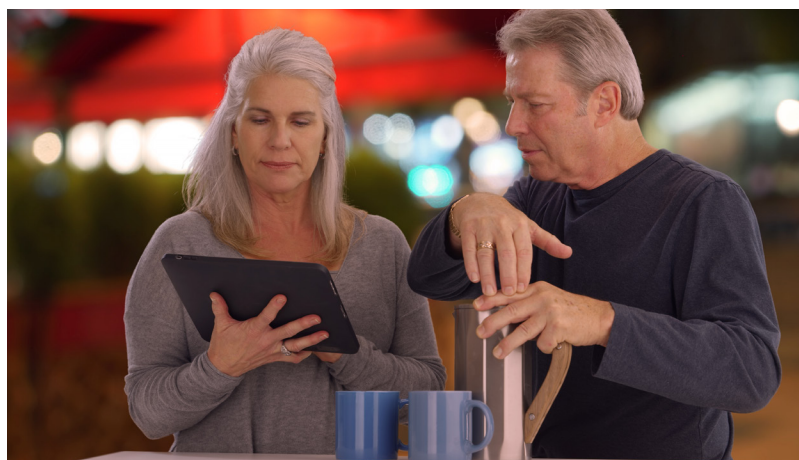
## Talking with others about your RA

It may be helpful to make a list of the people you want to talk with and what you want to talk with them about. You can start with the form below.

People I want to talk with about my RA	What I want to talk about
My children	How I might need some extra help around the house because of my pain

# Talking with your spouse or partner

You and your spouse or partner may talk openly about many things. But it may be hard to talk about the effects of RA, such as pain and stiffness or guilt and isolation. However, talking may help your spouse or partner understand how best to help you.



## Tips for talking with your spouse or partner

In the table below, place a check next to the tips you'd like to try.

Tips I want to try	How I will do it
<input type="checkbox"/> Be compassionate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>I will let my spouse or partner know that I understand he or she is hurting, too.</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid using toxic language.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>I will try to avoid using negative phrases such as "You never think of...".</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Make sure my spouse or partner understands what I'm trying to say.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>I will ask my spouse or partner to tell me what I said in his or her own words.</li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> Laugh.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>I will try to smile and have a sense of humor.</li></ul>

Write down your own ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Talking with your children

Whether your children are young or grown, it's important to speak with them about your RA. Let them know how it affects you and them. For example, you may need to explain that your family routine needs to change. Talking about RA with your children may help make living with the condition a little easier for everyone.



## Guide to talking with young children

Young children may need extra help understanding changes in your routine. Here are some ideas to guide your conversations.

Share activities you are comfortable doing:

**“I can’t play catch, but I can play a board game.”**

Be open and honest:

**“Sometimes I hurt a lot, and I need your help.”**

Make time to discuss other things:

**“Tell me how school was today.”**

Acknowledge the impact your condition may have on them:

**“Is there anything you want to talk about?”**

Explain new rules or boundaries:

**“We’ll still have rules, but some rules may change. For example...”**

Use positive language:

**“Together, we can handle this.”**

# Talking with other family members and friends

It can be hard to talk with family and friends about your RA. But they can make a difference by providing companionship and support. Here are some tips to get started.



## Share as much as you feel comfortable with.

- If you don't want to go into detail, say something like, "I have some pain in my joints that I'm seeing a doctor for."
- If you choose to share more, consider explaining what RA is and how it affects you.
- Talking about RA and your limitations may make it easier to ask for help and to say "no" to invitations when you need to.

## Take part in the kinds of activities you can do.

- Explain that you can't do some of the things you used to.
- Share some activities you feel comfortable doing.

## Think of the person you're talking with.

- Inviting a friend or relative to ask questions about your RA may help you both talk more openly.

# Talking with your employer and coworkers

For some people, having RA can create challenges at work. Your employer may be able to make work-related adjustments. If RA limits you in the workplace, you may decide you want to have a conversation with your employer. Here are points you may want to keep in mind.



## 1 Understand the options available through your employer

- See if your employer has any policies about making adjustments, such as:
  - Writing and grip aids
  - Adjusting desk or chair heights

## 2 Prepare for the conversation

- Determine your needs and make a list.
- Think about which of these are the most important to you.

## 3 Go into the conversation with an open mind

- Understand that your employer may not be able to address all of your needs.
- Be willing to find solutions that work for both you and your employer.

## 4 During the conversation

- Schedule a meeting with your employer. You may want to include someone from the human resources department.
- Be ready to take notes.
- Explain how RA has affected you and the limitations you now face.
- Share your requests, then ask for their feedback.



Visit [askjan.org](https://askjan.org) to learn more about your rights in the workplace and what kinds of accommodations might be available to you.





Learn more about  
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