



Tips for an active life with rheumatoid arthritis



Managing your RA

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) may affect many parts of your life. Fortunately, there may be ways to manage your RA. Treatment may help relieve symptoms and limit further joint damage. Medicine is one part of managing your disease. Making healthy lifestyle choices is another important part of managing RA. Your healthcare provider can help you identify changes in your lifestyle that may help you feel better.



Don't just live with the pain

If you still have joint pain and stiffness after you start treatment, talk with your healthcare provider. There may be options that help reduce your joint pain and other symptoms.

What makes symptoms worse?

You may have times when your RA symptoms get worse. This is called a flare. Triggers are what cause your RA symptoms to flare. People can have many different triggers. **Not all triggers are known, but some common ones you may notice are:**



Infection



Stress



Lack of sleep

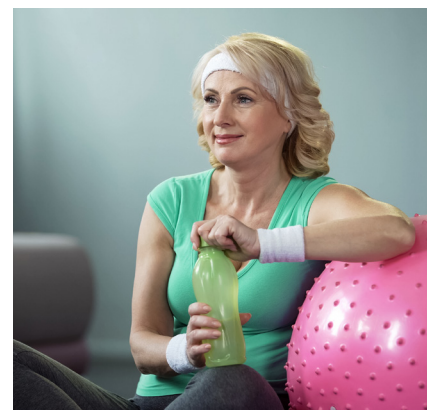


Too much or not enough physical activity

Keeping a journal may help you identify some of your triggers. Talk with your healthcare provider about your triggers and what you can do to help avoid them.

Stay active without overdoing it

Staying active can help reduce pain and keep your joints flexible. However, it is important to find a balance. Too much activity or too much rest may cause pain and stiffness. Talk to your healthcare provider about how much rest and activity is right for you.



Exercises for you to try

- **Stretching** can help with flexibility and range of motion.
- **Yoga and tai chi** combine deep breathing with movement or poses. These exercises help with flexibility, range of motion, and balance. They can also reduce stress.
- **Hand exercises** may help your hands and fingers stay flexible and strong.
- **Walking is a low-impact exercise** that can help your mood. It also helps strengthen your heart and lungs.
- **Swimming and pool exercises** are gentle on your joints. They help with flexibility, range of motion, and strength.



Tell your doctor which activities you enjoy. Ask which ones are best for you. Your doctor can give you tips for a new exercise routine or refer you to a physical therapist.



Rest your joints

- **Take breaks throughout the day** to save your energy and protect joints.
- If you feel okay after a short break, **try resuming your activity.**
- **Take a nap for 20 to 30 minutes.** This can help boost your energy.
- **Try moving your joints around while you're resting.** During a flare, too much rest may make the pain last longer.

Easing your RA pain

Medicine is an important part of treating pain from RA. Here are some other ideas to discuss with your healthcare provider for reducing pain:

- **Get a massage** to help relax muscles and reduce the pain.
- **Use a heating pad** or take a warm shower before starting an activity.
- **Wrap a bag of ice in a towel** and apply to painful areas for 10 to 20 minutes.
- **Use a brace** to help rest your joints.



Reduce stress

Having RA may make you feel sad, anxious, or stressed. Being in pain or being unable to do things can cause these feelings. **Stress may make your RA worse.** Yoga, meditation, or other ways of relaxing may help reduce stress. This may help reduce RA flares.



Set up a support system

Your family and friends can help in many ways. This can include help with activities in your daily life. Let them know how you are feeling. Tell them how they can help you with specific tasks, especially during a flare. Consider inviting a family member or friend to one of your appointments.



You can also ask your healthcare provider about support groups, including online communities, you can join. These groups let you share what you are going through and hear from other people with RA.

Track your progress

Record how severe your symptoms are over time and share this information with your healthcare provider. He or she may be able to suggest solutions or change your treatment plan to help you get better results.



Mark each symptom on a scale of 1 to 10, with **1** being low, **5** being moderate, and **10** being high.

Date	Pain	Joint swelling, stiffness	Tiredness	Stress	Comments / Activities
July 8	5	6	4	7	More painful in PM



Using this tracker as a guide, **create your own to track your symptoms over a longer period of time.**



Are you struggling with daily tasks?

Simple gadgets may make living with RA easier. Consider these:

- Door knob grips to help open doors
- Jar openers to help open lids
- Zipper pulls
- Long-handled shoe horns
- Handrails or tub bars for the shower
- Electric can openers, food processors, or slicing tools



Check out these resources
for more information about RA:

Arthritis Foundation®

arthritis.org

CreakyJoints

creakyjoints.org