

# Working with your rheumatoid arthritis healthcare team



# Working with your healthcare provider

**Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a life-long disease that causes pain, stiffness, and swelling in the joints.** If not treated properly, it can lead to permanent joint damage. The first step in finding out if you have RA is to tell your healthcare provider if you have problems with your joints. Information about how you feel can be helpful to your physician in providing treatment options.



## You may need to see a rheumatologist

If you have been diagnosed with RA, it's important to get the help of a rheumatologist. A rheumatologist is a doctor who specializes in treating arthritis and related conditions.

Rheumatologists use a variety of tools to find out if you have RA.

### At your visit, you may:

- Give your detailed medical and family history
- Have a physical exam
- Have blood tests
- Get X-rays or other imaging tests

## What to expect from treatment

RA may be managed through lifestyle changes and medicines.

### The ultimate goals are:

- To relieve the pain and swelling
- To reduce the inflammation
- To stop or slow down damage to joints

You and your healthcare provider will set specific goals and then monitor your progress with these goals in mind. At each office visit, your healthcare provider may conduct blood testing and a physical exam.

If your goals are not met, medication or doses may be changed. Your treatment plan may continue to change until your treatment goals are met.

# Preparing for your visit

You can do a lot to help in the success of your RA treatment plan. Working actively with your healthcare team is important. One thing you can do is prepare for healthcare visits. Be ready to answer all questions honestly. **Also, be ready to ask your own questions.**



## 1 Write down your questions or concerns before your appointment.

Check off what questions you would like to ask or write some of your own.

- ☐ What are some things I can do to help manage my RA?
- ☐ How will I know if my treatment is working?
- ☐ What are my treatment options?
- ☐ How soon should I begin to feel symptom relief?

## 2 Ask a friend or family member to go with you.

Make a list of some friends or family members who you think could go with you.

## 3 Make a list of medicines.

Make a list of prescription medicines and any over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbs, and supplements you are currently taking.

## 4 Set goals for your treatment.

List some goals you would like to reach with your treatment plan. Work with your healthcare provider to keep track of your progress.

My goal	Time frame
Swim 10 laps daily	Within 3 months of starting treatment plan

# Tell your healthcare provider how you are doing

Your healthcare provider needs to know how RA is affecting your life. This helps him or her manage your condition. **Be sure to discuss new or worsening symptoms.** They may be a sign that your RA is progressing and your treatment plan may need to be modified.



## Think about the following when you talk to your healthcare provider:

- Are your joints stiff in the morning?
- Do you have symptoms other than joint, muscle, or bone pain?
- Which joints bother you the most right now?
- Are there activities that improve your joint pain?
- Are there activities that worsen your joint pain?



## Talk to your healthcare provider about your emotional well-being

It is not always easy to talk about your emotions. However, it is important to tell your healthcare provider how RA is affecting you both physically and emotionally.

### Before you talk to your healthcare provider, think about these questions:

- What are the things that are hard to do? Are there hobbies or activities that have become more difficult?
- Are you feeling sad, frustrated, anxious, or irritated? How often?
- How is RA affecting your personal life?



## Is RA affecting your daily life?

RA may make it hard to do everyday activities. Use the chart below to note how easy or difficult it is to do everyday tasks. Write in other activities that you find difficult or are unable to do. Then, take this chart to your healthcare team and talk about it.

How difficult are these activities for you?	Easy	Difficult	Unable to do
Tying shoelaces, using buttons			
Getting out of a chair			
Cutting up your food			
Opening a new milk carton			
Walking outdoors on flat ground			
Climbing up a few steps			
Bending down to pick up an item			
Turning faucets on and off			
Typing on a computer			

Are there other activities that are difficult for you?

↪ Tear off and share with your healthcare provider.

## Treating RA over time



Talk to your healthcare provider if your symptoms change or worsen. If something is bothering you, mention it.

### Topics to discuss at each office visit include:

- Any concerns or questions
- How the treatments are working
- Things you can do to manage RA
- How you are feeling emotionally
- Clarification if you don't understand any instructions

*Lilly*



Check out these resources  
for more information about RA:

**Arthritis Foundation®**

[arthritis.org](https://arthritis.org)

**CreakyJoints**

[creakyjoints.org](https://creakyjoints.org)