



DOCTOR DISCUSSION GUIDE

Managing Rheumatoid Arthritis

Living with rheumatoid arthritis means a variety of symptoms to deal with, and an array of treatment and management options to consider. Asking the right questions during your conversation will help you know what to expect and how to better navigate your condition. Familiarize yourself with these common terms before your appointment to help facilitate your discussion.

Vocabulary to Know

Your doctor might mention these common terms. Here's what they mean.

Rheumatic/Rheumatoid	Rheumatic means a disease or condition that mainly targets the joints, bones, muscles, and connective tissues. That encompasses all forms of arthritis. The rheumatoid in rheumatoid arthritis is used to distinguish it from other types of arthritis but doesn't refer directly to unique aspects of the disease.
Autoimmune Disease	A condition where the immune system works to destroy healthy tissues in the body because it mistakes them for dangerous invaders, such as a virus or bacteria.
Elevated Erythrocyte Sedimentation Rate (sed rate or ESR)	A blood test that helps diagnose rheumatoid arthritis and many other conditions, which measures how quickly red blood cells settle to the bottom of a container. However, it doesn't indicate whether inflammation comes from chronic disease, infection, or injury. Thus, it's only part of a diagnostic process.
C-Reactive Protein (CRP)	A protein found in plasma. Concentrations can rise significantly due to inflammation, so this test is a sign of inflammation that may indicate an inflammatory disease, but not a specific marker for rheumatoid arthritis.
Anti-Cyclic Citrullinated Peptide (anti-CCP antibodies)	Specific markers of rheumatoid arthritis. They show up in the blood tests of between 60 and 70 percent people with this disease. Anti-CCP antibodies are produced by the immune system and attack tissues, causing symptoms.
Disease-Modifying Antirheumatic Drug (DMARD)	Drugs used to slow down the progression of joint damage in rheumatoid arthritis. This isn't a class of drugs, but an umbrella term for numerous, unrelated drugs used to fight this disease. Common DMARDs include Plaquenil (hydroxychloroquine), Azulfidine (sulfasalazine), and Trexall (methotrexate).
Non-Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs)	Medications that reduce pain, inflammation, and fever. The most common ones are the over-the-counter drugs ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil), naproxen (Aleve), and aspirin, but several prescription NSAIDs are also available.
Biologic Agents	Living organisms or products of living organisms. They can be used to prevent, diagnose, or treat certain diseases. Several biologics are used to treat rheumatoid arthritis, including Enbrel (etanercept), Humira (adalimumab), Orencia (abatacept), and Remicade (infliximab).
Synovectomy	One of several surgeries designed to alleviate problems associated with rheumatoid arthritis. The surgeon removes inflamed synovial tissue (a type of connective tissue) from inside the joint.



Questions to Ask

These questions will help you start a conversation with your doctor about how to best manage your rheumatoid arthritis.

About Symptoms

- Will my symptoms get worse?
- Will I require the use of a wheelchair or other assistive device?
- What is the typical progression of this disease?

About Causes & Risk Factors

- Is it possible to pinpoint why I have rheumatoid arthritis?
- What are the chances my kids will have rheumatoid arthritis?

About Diagnosis

- What do the test results mean for my prognosis?

About Treatment

- What type of medication should I try for treatment?
- How soon should I see results?
- What are the side effects of these treatments?
- What is the next step if the treatment doesn't work?
- Can supplements help?

About Coping

- Is it common to develop depression living with RA?
- Should I see a therapist to adjust to living with a chronic illness?
- Do you know of any relevant support groups in my area?

About Living With RA

- What kinds of activities should I engage in?
- What kinds of activities should I avoid?
- Should I stop working?
- What positive changes can I make to my diet?
