



Points To Remember About Reactive Arthritis

- Reactive arthritis is pain or swelling in a joint caused by an infection in your body. You may also have red, swollen eyes and a swollen urinary tract.
- Doctors may use a combination of tests to confirm that you have reactive arthritis.
- Symptoms are usually treated with medications that reduce inflammation, fight infection, and stop your immune system from attacking its own tissues.
- Exercise can reduce joint pain and stiffness. It can also help you lose weight to reduce stress on joints.

What is reactive arthritis?

Reactive arthritis is pain or swelling in a joint that is caused by an infection in your body. You may also have red, swollen eyes and a swollen urinary tract. These symptoms may occur alone, together, or not at all.

Most people with reactive arthritis recover fully from the first flare of symptoms and can return to regular activities 2 to 6 months later. Some people will have long-term, mild [arthritis](#). A few patients will have long-term, severe arthritis that is difficult to control with treatment and may cause joint damage.

Who gets reactive arthritis?

Men between ages 20 and 40 are most likely to get reactive arthritis. Men are also more likely than women to get the form that is caused by a bacteria passed along during sex. Women and men are at equal risk of getting the disease because of bacteria in food. Women with reactive arthritis often have milder symptoms than men.

What are the symptoms of reactive arthritis?

Symptoms of reactive arthritis may be so mild that you do not notice them. They can come and go over a period of weeks or months. In a few people, symptoms can turn into a long-term

disease.

Symptoms of reactive arthritis can include:

- Joint swelling and pain.
- Inflammation of the urinary and genital tract.
- Redness and swelling of the eyes.
- Mouth sores and skin rashes.

What causes reactive arthritis?

Reactive arthritis may be set off by an infection in the bladder or the urethra, which carries urine out of the body. In women, an infection in the vagina can spark the reaction. For both men and women, it can start with bacteria passed on during sex. Another form of reactive arthritis starts with eating food or handling something that has bacteria on it.

You can't pass your reactive arthritis on to someone else. However, you can pass along the bacteria that can trigger the disease.

Doctors do not know why some people develop reactive arthritis and others do not.

Is there a test for reactive arthritis?

There is no specific lab test to confirm that you have reactive arthritis. Doctors sometimes find it difficult to diagnose. Tests the doctor may order include:

- Complete medical history.
- Blood tests.
- Tests for infections.
- X-rays.

How is reactive arthritis treated?

There is no cure for reactive arthritis, but some treatments ease the symptoms. Your doctor might use one or more of the following:

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) to treat pain and inflammation.
- Corticosteroids injected into painful joints or applied to skin sores.
- Antibiotics to fight the bacterial infection that triggered the disease.
- Medicines to stop the immune system from attacking its own tissues.

Who treats reactive arthritis?

Diagnosing and treating reactive arthritis requires a team effort involving you and several types of health care professionals. These may include:

- Rheumatologists, who specialize in [arthritis](#) and other diseases of the bones, joints, and muscles. Your rheumatologist will also coordinate care between your different doctors.
- Ophthalmologists, who treat eye disease.
- Urologists or gynecologists, who treat genital symptoms.
- Dermatologists, who treat skin symptoms.
- Orthopaedists, who perform surgery on severely damaged joints.
- Physiatrists, who help with exercise programs.

Living with reactive arthritis

Exercise can reduce joint pain and stiffness. It can also help you lose weight to reduce stress on joints. You should speak to your doctor about a safe, well-rounded exercise program.

For more info

[U.S. Food and Drug Administration](#)

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA (888-463-6332)

[Drugs@FDA](#). Drugs@FDA is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics](#)

[National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases](#)

[American College of Rheumatology](#)

[Arthritis Foundation](#)

[Spondylitis Association of America](#)

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- [Asian Language Health Information](#)
- [Spanish Language Health Information](#)