



Points To Remember About Arthritis and Rheumatic Diseases

- The term arthritis is often used to refer to any disorder that affects the joints.
- Rheumatic diseases usually affect joints, tendons, ligaments, bones, and muscles. Some rheumatic diseases can also affect the organs.
- People with arthritis usually feel pain in one or more joints. Joints may also be warm, red, or hard to move.
- There are probably many genes that make people more likely to have rheumatic diseases.
- If you have the disease gene, something in your environment—such as a virus or injury—may trigger the disease.
- Medications are often used to treat symptoms of arthritis and rheumatic diseases. Surgery may be an option in some cases.
- There are many other things you can do to help you live with arthritis and other rheumatic diseases.

What are arthritis and **rheumatic diseases**?

The term arthritis is often used to refer to any disorder that affects the joints. There are more than 100 rheumatic diseases. Rheumatic diseases usually affect joints, tendons, ligaments, bones, and muscles. Some rheumatic diseases can also affect the organs.

Who gets **arthritis** and **rheumatic diseases**?

Rheumatic diseases affect millions of people of all races and ages in the United States.

What are the types of **arthritis** and **rheumatic diseases**?

There are numerous types of arthritis and other rheumatic diseases, including:

- **Osteoarthritis** is the most common type of arthritis. It damages cartilage (tissue that cushions the ends of bones) and bone.
- **Rheumatoid arthritis** occurs when the body attacks the joint's lining. The hands and feet are mostly affected.
- **Gout** is a type of arthritis caused by crystals that form in the joints, usually beginning in the big toe.
- **Infectious arthritis** is caused by bacteria or viruses.
- **Juvenile idiopathic arthritis** is the most common form of arthritis in childhood
- **Spondyloarthropathies** usually affect the spine. There are a few forms:
 - *Ankylosing spondylitis* may also affect the hips, shoulders, and knees.
 - *Reactive arthritis* is caused by urinary tract or bowel infection.
 - *Psoriatic arthritis* occurs in some patients with the skin disorder, psoriasis.
- **Bursitis** occurs when small, fluid-filled sacs in the joint become swollen.
- **Fibromyalgia** causes muscle pain and tender points—areas on the body that are painful when pushed.
- **Polymyalgia rheumatica** affects many of the structures around the joint.
- **Polymyositis** causes muscle swelling and weakness.
- **Scleroderma** causes the skin, blood vessels, and joints to become thicker. The disease sometimes also affects the lungs and kidneys.
- **Systemic lupus erythematosus** swelling and damage to the joints, skin, kidneys, heart, lungs, blood vessels, and brain.
- **Tendinitis** causes swelling of the tissues that connect muscle to bone.

What are the symptoms of arthritis and rheumatic diseases?

There are different symptoms, depending upon the disease. People with arthritis usually feel pain in one or more joints. Joints may also be warm, red, or hard to move.

What causes arthritis and rheumatic diseases?

There are probably many genes that make people more likely to have rheumatic diseases. Research has found some of these genes.

If you have the disease gene, something in your environment—such as a virus or injury—may trigger the disease.

Are there tests for arthritis and rheumatic diseases?

To diagnosis you with arthritis or another rheumatic disease, your doctor may:

- Ask you about your medical history.
- Give you a physical exam.
- Take samples for a laboratory test.
- Take x-rays.

How are arthritis and rheumatic diseases treated?

There are many treatments that can help relieve pain and help you live with arthritis and rheumatic diseases. You should talk to your doctor about the best treatments for you, which can include:

- **Medications** to relieve pain, slow the disease, and prevent further damage.
- **Surgery** to repair joint damage or relieve pain.

Who treats arthritis and rheumatic diseases?

Doctors who diagnose and treat arthritis and other rheumatic disease include:

- General practitioners, such as your family doctor.
- Rheumatologists, who specialize in arthritis and other diseases of the bones, joints, and muscles.
- Orthopaedists, who specialize in treatment and surgery for bone and joint diseases.
- Physical therapists, who help improve joint function.
- Occupational therapists, who teach ways to protect joints, minimize pain, perform activities of daily living, and conserve energy.
- Dietitians, who teach about good diets and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Nurse educators, who help you understand your condition and help start treatment plans.
- Rehabilitation specialists, who help you make the most of your physical potential.
- Licensed acupuncture therapists, who reduce pain and improve physical functioning by inserting fine needles into the skin at specific points on the body.
- Psychologists or social workers, who help with social challenges caused by medical conditions.
- Chiropractors, who focus treatment on the relationship between the body's structure—mainly the spine—and its functioning.
- Massage therapists, who press, rub, and otherwise manipulate the muscles and other soft tissues of the body.

Living with arthritis and rheumatic diseases

There are many things you can do to help you live with arthritis and other rheumatic diseases, including:

- Exercise can reduce joint pain and stiffness. It also helps with losing weight, which reduces stress on the joints. You should speak to your doctor about a safe, well-rounded exercise program.
- Diet is especially important if you have gout. You should avoid alcohol and foods such as liver, kidney, sardines, anchovies, and gravy.
- Heat and cold therapies can reduce joint pain and swelling.
- Relaxation therapy can help reduce pain by teaching you ways to relax your muscles.
- Splints and braces support weakened joints or allow them to rest. You should see your doctor to make sure your splint or brace fits well.
- Assistive devices such as a cane or shoe insert can ease pain when walking. Other devices can help you open jars, close zippers, or hold pencils.

For more info

U.S. Food and Drug Administration

Toll free: 888-INFO-FDA ([888-463-6332](tel:888-463-6332))

Website: <https://www.fda.gov>

Drugs@FDA at <https://www.accessdata.fda.gov/scripts/cder/daf>. Drugs@FDA is a searchable catalog of FDA-approved drug products.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics

Website: <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs>

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

Website: <https://www.niaid.nih.gov>

National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health

Website: <https://nccih.nih.gov>

American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons

Website: <https://www.aaos.org>

American College of Rheumatology

Website: <https://www.rheumatology.org>

Arthritis Foundation

Website: <https://www.arthritis.org>

If you need more information about available resources in your language or other languages, please visit our webpages below or contact the NIAMS Information Clearinghouse at NIAMSInfo@mail.nih.gov.

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