Basics

What are they?

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.
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 them?**

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

**What are the types?**

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?**

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 them?**

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?**

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 they 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 them?**

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 Them

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)
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
Related Information

Questions and Answers about Ankylosing Spondylitis
What Is Ankylosing Spondylitis (fast facts, easy-to-read)
¿Qué es la espondilitis anquilosante? (Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil lectura)
Living With Arthritis: Health Information Basics for You and Your Family
Cómo vivir con artritis: Información básica de salud para usted y su familia
Questions and Answers about Bursitis and Tendinitis
What Are Bursitis and Tendinitis? (Fast facts, easy-to-read)
¿Qué son la bursitis y la tendinitis? (Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil lectura)
Questions and Answers about Fibromyalgia
What Is Fibromyalgia? (fast facts, easy-to-read)
¿Qué es la fibromialgia? (Esenciales: Hojas informativas de fácil lectura)
Questions and Answers about Gout
What Is Gout? (fast facts, easy-to-read)
¿Qué es la gota? (Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil lectura)
Questions and Answers about Juvenile Arthritis
What Is Juvenile Arthritis? (fast facts, easy-to-read)
Esenciales: ¿Qué es la artritis juvenil? (hojas informativas de fácil lectura)
Osteoarthritis, Handout on Health
What Is Osteoarthritis? (fast facts, easy-to-read)
¿Qué es la osteoartritis? (Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil lectura)
Questions and Answers about Polymyalgia Rheumatica and Giant Cell Arteritis
What Are Polymyalgia Rheumatica and Giant Cell Arteritis? (fast facts, easy-to-read)
¿Qué son la polimialgia reumática y la arteritis de células gigantes? (Esenciales:)
Psoriatic Arthritis Overview
Questions and Answers about Reactive Arthritis
What Is Reactive Arthritis? (fast facts, easy-to-read)
¿Qué es la artritis reactiva? (Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil lectura)
Rheumatoid Arthritis, Handout on Health
What Is Rheumatoid Arthritis? (Fast Facts, easy-to-read)
¿Qué es la artritis reumatoide? (Esenciales: Hojas informativas de fácil lectura)
Scleroderma, Handout on Health
¿Qué es la esclerodermia? (Esenciales: hojas informativas de fácil lectura)
Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, Handout on Health
Living With Lupus: Health Information Basics for You and Your Family
What Is Lupus? (fast facts, easy-to-read)
¿Qué es el lupus? (Esenciales: Hojas informativas de fácil lectura)
Healthy Joints Matter

View/Download/Order Publications

Gout, Questions and Answers about