

60-Second Guide to Rheumatoid Arthritis

www.RheumatoidArthritisGuy.com

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Hi! This is me, **Rheumatoid Arthritis Guy**. I am a superhero who lives with rheumatoid arthritis. My illness will last a lifetime, but reading this guide to RA will only take a minute - I promise. (I'll even use a countdown timer, just like they do in the action movies!) Can one get a better understanding of rheumatoid arthritis in just 60 seconds? Let's give it a try!

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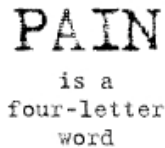
Rheumatoid arthritis is an **autoimmune disease** that causes chronic inflammation of the joints (and sometimes, the organs). An autoimmune disease is an illness where the body's immune system mistakenly identifies healthy cells as invaders cells. The result: the body sends out antibodies to attack these healthy cells. (It sure sounds like the Joker is talking...are you confused yet?)

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Okay, let's pretend that your body is Gotham City. Your immune system is Batman. Your joints? Well, they are tiny **bat signals**. Batman - thinking that Gotham City is being invaded - is forever going to all the bat signals and attacking everything in the vicinity, leaving behind lots of damage. (He never seems to realize that these bat signals are actually false alarms.)

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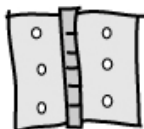
No words can accurately describe the physical **pain** that is caused by rheumatoid arthritis. (Although this mental image, for me, does come close: A Mack truck ran over me. And then it backed up, and ran over me again!) Rheumatoid arthritis pain is chronic and is not something that can be easily fixed with just an aspirin. This pain can be one of the most crippling aspects of living with RA.

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The constant attack on otherwise healthy joints leads to **inflammation** - the joints become red and swollen. When joints are constantly inflamed they eventually begin to move around. This can lead to disfigurement and joint damage, which can sometimes be permanent. Many of the symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis are directly related to this inflammatory process.

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Joint that are continually inflamed often begin to experience extended periods of **stiffness**. This can sometimes lead to drastic reductions in strength and mobility. One of the most prominent symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis is morning stiffness - and unlike a squeaky hinge, we can't just add a few drops of oil to make things better. (If only.)

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This information is not a substitute for professional medical advice and care.
If you have specific needs, please see a professional health care provider.

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When rheumatoid arthritis is active, a person can easily become extremely tired. Actually - it surpasses mere tiredness and rises to the level of **fatigue**. This constant lack of energy can be one of the most limiting aspects of life with RA. Quite often, a person's level of daily activity must be reduced and periods of sleep and rest must be increased.

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Living with RA can bring about many emotional challenges. Stress and anxiety levels may increase. Periods of **depression**, feelings of losing hope, and thoughts of suicide might become more frequent. Coping with chronic illness is difficult. If you feel that you or someone you love might be in danger of harming themselves, please reach out for help.

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"But you
are too
young."

Rheumatoid arthritis is not related to **age** - it can affect people young and old alike. There is even a juvenile form of RA. Many people confuse RA with osteoarthritis, another form of arthritis which is typically associated with age. So if you really want to compliment a person on their young looks, go ahead! (But please don't forget, no one is "too young" to have RA.)

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"YOU
DON'T
LOOK
SICK"

Some people living with RA might show visible signs of joint damage, or may use assistive mobility devices. However, in many cases of rheumatoid arthritis the illness is **invisible**. Many people show no visible signs of RA. So once again, if you want to compliment someone on their good looks, go ahead. (But please don't forget, people with RA don't necessarily "look sick".)

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Although there is currently no cure for rheumatoid arthritis, many treatment options are available. Just as Superman had his Justice League, so too does RA Guy have his **Team RA**. A 360° approach is recommended: rheumatologist, psychologist, physical therapist, acupuncturist, spiritual guide, holistic healer, dietician, surgeon, and massage therapist.

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(Unlike in the movies, my final five seconds don't last half an hour!) Life with RA: Don't lose **hope**! Talk to a friend, family member, or co-worker about RA. Visit one of the many online support groups, forums, and blogs that are available for people living with RA and their caregivers. Together we can increase awareness of rheumatoid arthritis - it only takes a minute!

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