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Self-Help and Living with Rheumatoid Arthritis

By Yolanda Smith, BPharm

For patients living with rheumatoid arthritis, there are several daily living tips and techniques that can help to reduce symptoms and improve overall quality of life.

Physical Activity and Rest

Gentle exercise is a core component of the treatment plan for rheumatoid arthritis because significant benefits are evident. Low-impact aerobic activity, and muscle strengthening and flexibility exercises are thought to be most beneficial. Ideal activities include:

- Walking
- Swimming
- Water aerobics

However, it is important this activity is balanced by periods of rest, particularly when the disease is active and the painful, swollen or stiff joints pose a significant problem.

Hot and Cold Therapy

Both hot and cold therapies can be useful in the long-term management and self-care of rheumatoid arthritis.

Heat pads or warm baths are most beneficial to soothe stiff joints and muscles, whereas cold packs are ideal for relieving acute pain and inflammation.

Relaxation Techniques

Relaxation techniques can also be helpful to cope with the pain and reduce stress in life. These techniques may include:

- Deep breathing
- Guided imagery
- Visualization
- Distraction
- Muscle relaxation
- Massage

Diet

Although there is no specific diet for patients with rheumatoid arthritis, there are certain foods that may help to relieve or worsen symptoms.

For example, foods [rich in antioxidants](#) can help to control and reduce related inflammation. The Mediterranean diet has been linked to better outcomes regarding the disease, which is high in antioxidants and vitamins A, C and E.

Individuals with rheumatoid arthritis are likely to benefit from eating more fresh fruits and vegetables, which are high in antioxidant and vitamin content, and avoiding processed foods. Dairy products and acidic foods, including citrus fruits, may also aggravate symptoms.

Pharmacotherapy

Most patients with rheumatoid arthritis will have a medication plan from their doctor, which they should follow as prescribed for the best results.

Additionally, topical treatments can be applied directly to the painful area to relieve acute symptoms. Depending on the case, topical treatments containing non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), salicylates or capsaicin may all offer a benefit.

There are also some supplements that have been linked to an improvement in symptoms, particularly joint pain and morning stiffness. Turmeric and omega-3 fish oil supplements may both be indicated, but this should be included in

the overall treatment plan discussed with the doctor and patient.

Support

It is important for affected individuals to have a strong support network of family and friends that will help them throughout the changes that occur in rheumatoid arthritis.

People with rheumatoid arthritis are more likely to be affected by depression, anxiety and have low self-esteem. Many patients may find that discussing struggles and issues with someone else – a family member, friend or health professional – can help to lift the weight on their shoulders.

Other Self-Help Tips

Tips for people living with rheumatoid arthritis include:

- Take control of treatment and action plan
- Recognize limits and take a rest when tired
- Socialize and connect with other people
- Spend time enjoying some activities by yourself

Finally, if any significant changes in symptoms or other characteristics of the condition are observed, it is best for the patient to seek help from a medical professional that can provide the relevant advice.

References

- <http://www.arthritis.org/about-arthritis/types/rheumatoid-arthritis/self-care.php>
- <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/manage/ptc-20197414>
- <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Rheumatoid-arthritis/Pages/Living-with.aspx>
- <http://www.nras.org.uk/what-diet-to-recommend-to-patients-with-rheumatoid-arthritis->

Further Reading

- [What is Rheumatoid Arthritis?](#)
- [What Causes Rheumatoid Arthritis?](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis Symptoms](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis Diagnosis](#)
- [Rheumatoid Factor Test](#)
- [Knee Rheumatoid Arthritis](#)
- [Total Knee Replacement and Rheumatoid Arthritis](#)
- [Hip Rheumatoid Arthritis](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis and Feet](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis and Pregnancy](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis, Family Planning & Pregnancy](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis and Gum Disease](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis and Depression](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis and Gout](#)
- [Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis](#)
- [Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis Symptoms](#)
- [Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis Types](#)
- [Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis Diagnosis](#)
- [Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis Treatment](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis Nodules](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis Treatment](#)
- [Disease-Modifying AntiRheumatic Drugs \(DMARDs\)](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis Management](#)
- [Radiotherapy and Rheumatoid Arthritis](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis and Acupuncture](#)
- [Yoga and Tai chi in Rheumatoid Arthritis](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis and Exercise](#)

- [Rheumatoid Arthritis Diet and Nutrition](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis Research](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis Support](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis Prognosis](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis Complications](#)
- [Rheumatoid Arthritis Epidemiology](#)
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