

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease where the body mistakes healthy tissues for pathogens and attacks them. It is an inflammatory disease and causes inflammation and damage to the joints of the body. It often affects the joints of the knees, wrists and hands but can also affect other tissues such as the spine, heart, lungs and eyes. Cardiovascular Disease risk is higher in patients with RA.

Treatments

Treatment is mainly via medications but sometimes surgery is required to correct joint deformities.

Medicines, such as Methotrexate, aim to slow down the disease progression by reducing the impact of the chemicals that cause inflammation in the joints. Medicines can also be taken to reduce pain.



Physical Activity and Rheumatoid Arthritis



Aerobic and strength based exercise can help to reduce the inflammation and joint damage created by RA. It can also help to preserve muscle mass to prevent Rheumatoid cachexia, which is the degradation of muscle mass that occurs due to the inflammatory component of RA. By engaging in physical activity, the general progression and trajectory of the disease can be dramatically reduced and result in great increases in mobility which improves quality of life.

Exercise Recommendations

Progressive resistance training in RA is safe and has been shown to be highly effective in reducing the effects of Rheumatoid cachexia. Aerobic exercise can help to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease associated with RA.

Aerobic Exercise Recommendations

Cycling, Walking, Swimming or Dancing
For 30–60 Minutes, on
3–5 Days Per Week
At Moderate or Vigorous Intensities
*Gradually Progress Time and Intensity
Over Time

Resistance Exercise Recommendations

Resistance Bands, Fixed or Free Weights
For 2–3 Sets on Each Muscle Group of
8–12 Repetitions, on
2–3 Days Per Week
*Gradually Progress The Weight Used Over
Time

Exercise guidelines are for **optimal benefits**. Any increase in activity will produce benefits and if you are new to exercise, start gradually and build up over time.



Exercise Assessment

At the beginning of an exercise program, you may engage in an assessment of your current strength and fitness levels.

This will allow an exercise program to be tailored to you and will ensure the programme is set at the right level for you to achieve the benefits listed above. You may be referred for exercise tolerance testing initially, to check for heart issues.

The exercise assessments you do, will be tailored to your current levels of functionality.



Exercise with RA is Safe

Studies show that many people with RA are afraid that exercise will make their joints worse. The opposite is in fact true.

It is important however, to see your GP to regularly check heart health due to the increased risk of heart disease.

If you have heart disease, see information for cardiac rehabilitation programmes which will tailor the programme to include exercise suitable for heart conditions.

References

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