

Articles

19. Self Management Techniques for Rheumatoid Arthritis

Self Management Techniques for Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a progressive autoimmune disease where the body's immune system attacks the body itself, leading to a wide range of symptoms and even joint deformities. Though there is no cure for RA, treatment has evolved significantly over the years and now is treated early on and quite aggressively. A variety of medications are available to help manage RA symptoms. In addition, there are many things you can do on your own to help relieve your symptoms and prevent the disease from getting worse. Management techniques that you can control include:

- Resting when you are tired – RA itself and dealing with RA pain can cause fatigue. Plan your day and your activities carefully, including rest periods. Depending on your RA symptoms, rest periods may need to be frequent and/or prolonged.
- Protect your joints – modify your daily activities so that you don't over stress your joints. Heat therapy such as warm baths, paraffin baths and use of heating pads or electric blankets can help alleviate joint pain.
- Use assistive devices – use of special kitchen tools and adaptive hardware can help reduce stress on your joints. Using walkers, canes or splints can improve function and help reduce or alleviate pain.
- Stay active – It is important to keep moving for your overall health and to maintain your flexibility and strength. In some cases physical therapy may be recommended by your physician. RA exercises may include stretching, strengthening and aerobic exercise. The type of exercise that will be most beneficial for you may vary depending on your specific joint problems and degree of symptoms. For instance, swimming may be more appropriate if your symptoms involve the lower extremities and biking or walking if symptoms are more pronounced in the upper extremities.
- Manage your stress – first identify what is causing the stress in order to find solutions to manage it. Solutions may include taking time to relax, listening to relaxing music, performing deep breathing exercises and even doing meditation. If your stress becomes too unbearable and unmanageable you may want to consider seeking professional help such as your doctor, a counselor or assistance from an RA support group.
- Eat a healthy diet – foods low in saturated fat, cholesterol and salt and high in fiber and complex carbohydrates are recommended for RA sufferers.

To properly manage RA it is important not only to rely on the expertise of your rheumatologist but also take steps to care for yourself.

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