

## Rheumatoid Arthritis Explained

The pain of arthritis plagues millions of people, every day. In all, there are more than two hundred different diseases that involve joint inflammation and pain. One of the most prevalent and potentially disabling forms of arthritis is called rheumatoid arthritis. In order to enhance your chances of living more comfortably with rheumatoid arthritis, it's important to understand the prevalence and causes of the disease.

Rheumatoid arthritis can manifest in many parts of the body. Most of the body's joints are prone to rheumatoid arthritis, as well as the heart, lungs, blood and other areas within the body. Rheumatoid arthritis is prevalent in roughly 2.1 million Americans, accounting for approximately one percent of all adults living in the United States. The disease is caused by an inflammation of the lining of a joint. The patient will feel pain and stiffness in the joint, and will experience swelling, redness and a feeling of warmth in the joint area. The inflammation caused by rheumatoid arthritis can also affect the body's salivary glands, tear ducts and the linings of the human heart and lungs.

This disease can last a lifetime, and with little or no warning the patient can go from being virtually pain-free, to enduring bouts of intense discomfort. Rheumatoid arthritis usually occurs in adults between twenty and fifty years of age. A person experiencing swelling, redness, tenderness and a feeling of warmth in a joint may have rheumatoid arthritis. This feeling may be prevalent on both joints. For example, if one has rheumatoid arthritis in their left elbow, they may also feel the symptoms in their right elbow. The pain and tenderness usually lasts for an extended period of time, and the patient may feel the same symptoms in other parts of the body.

Rheumatoid arthritis is caused by the body's immune system. Sometimes, the immune system malfunctions and mistakes normal joint tissues as foreign invaders. In this case, the body will do its best to destroy the joint tissue, leading to the symptoms associated with rheumatoid arthritis. The exact cause of this problem is yet to be determined, but scientists in the field contend that genetics and heredity may play an important role.

When diagnosing a case of rheumatoid arthritis, doctors will often employ the use of blood tests to verify the presence of an antibody known as the 'rheumatoid factor'. If this antibody is found to be present, there is a good chance that the person is afflicted with rheumatoid arthritis. Seventy and ninety percent of all rheumatoid arthritis sufferers have this antibody in their bloodstreams, a fact that allows doctors to make a pretty accurate assessment of a person's risk of rheumatoid arthritis. Doctors may also perform x-rays to determine exactly how much of the patient's joint tissue has been affected by rheumatoid arthritis.

Like most diseases, early detection can help bring about relief. If you experience symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis that last for two weeks or longer, it's important to talk to your doctor for a full assessment. If the disease is present, begin treatment immediately.