TAKING CARE OF YOUR RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS
RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS (RA) FAST FACTS

What is Rheumatoid Arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic disease that can affect your ability to function and be mobile. It is an autoimmune disease where the body attacks healthy tissue called the synovium, which is a thin membrane that lines the joints. This causes pain and inflammation (swelling) which leads to joint damage, including the loss of cartilage and bone as the disease progresses.

RA can lead to permanent disability. Early diagnosis and treatment is important. It can improve function, help slow or stop permanent damage to joints and prevent disability. Successful treatment for RA involves a combination of medicines, rest, joint-strengthening exercises and patient education.
What are the signs and symptoms of RA?

- Stiffness
- Swelling
- Pain
- Redness
- Slight fever
- Tiredness
- Malaise (feeling ill)
- Loss of appetite, which can lead to weight loss

How is RA treated?

There are two types of medicines used to treat RA — those that can help relieve symptoms and those that can prevent joint damage from getting worse (disease-modifying medicines).

Medicines for Symptom Relief:

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen (brand names: Motrin, Advil) and naproxen (brand names: Naprosyn, Aleve) can help relieve pain and treat swelling. Analgesics such as acetaminophen (brand name: Tylenol) and tramadol (brand name: Ultram) can relieve pain but have no effect on swelling. Corticosteroids such as prednisone (brand name: Deltasone) can help relieve RA symptoms. Low doses are sometimes used with other medicines to help control severe joint swelling.
Disease-Modifying Medicines:
Medicines called disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs) treat arthritis symptoms and can also slow down joint damage. DMARDs such as methotrexate (brand names: Rheumatrex, Trexall) and hydroxychloroquine (brand name: Plaquenil) help slow or stop the disease and prevent further joint damage. If you’re not currently taking a DMARD, please talk with your doctor to see if it’s right for you.

Other treatment options include:
• Exercise; being active
• Rest
• Physical and occupational therapy
• Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) such as herbal remedies, acupuncture and chiropractic medicine
• Mind-body therapies including practices such as relaxation and breathing exercises
• Dietary supplements such as vitamins
• Surgery

Is it OK to skip a dose of RA medicine?
Take your RA medicine as directed by your doctor to help slow down the progress of RA and help with the symptoms and pain. If you are finding it hard to take your medicine on time, see the “Hints to Help You Take Your Medicine” in this brochure or talk to your doctor.
What other tests are needed?

Routine tests at the time of diagnosis are important. They can help your doctor assess how far your RA has progressed, rule out other conditions and choose the best treatment. Key tests include:

- **Blood tests:**
  - Complete blood count (CBC)
  - Comprehensive metabolic panel (CMP)
  - Rheumatoid factor (RF)
  - Anti-CCP antibodies
  - Acute-phase reactants

- **Imaging tests:**
  - X-rays
  - MRIs
  - Bone Scans

What can happen if RA is not controlled?

If you are skipping doses of your medicine or do not follow your doctor’s treatment plan, you may increase your chance of:

- Emergency room visits
- Hospitalizations
- Missed work days
- Joint damage
- Disability
The medicine your doctor prescribes can help control your RA and its symptoms. But if you don’t take your medicines exactly as your doctor orders, you increase your chance of having heart or kidney disease, stroke or blindness.

This brochure can help you get the most out of your medicine. Read the hints below and go over the “Questions for Your Doctor” during your next office visit.

If you haven’t already seen a rheumatologist, a doctor specializing in the treatment of RA, make an appointment to see one. If required by your plan, you’ll need to see your primary care physician (PCP) first to get a referral. You should complete a Joint Profile before you meet. It can help give both you and your rheumatologist a better understanding of your condition. It can help you describe how much your joints hurt, measure your range of motion and see how RA may be limiting the things you can do. You can print out a Joint Profile from our website, www.emblemhealth.com/healthtips.

HINTS TO HELP YOU TAKE YOUR MEDICINE

• Make taking your RA medicine part of your daily routine. Leave your medicine where you brush your teeth to help you remember to take it.

• Set the alarm on your watch, clock or cell phone to help remind you to take your medicine at the right time.

• Some medicines work better when taken with food while others do not. If your medicine should be taken with food, keep it on the kitchen counter as a reminder to take it with your meal.

• Ask a friend or family member to call you to help remind you to take your medicine. It is a great way to stay in touch too!
QUESTIONS FOR YOUR DOCTOR

1. Why am I taking this medicine and how will it help my rheumatoid arthritis? ______________________
________________________________________________________________________________

2. How often and at what times of the day should I take this medicine? ______________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

3. What should I do if I miss a dose? ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

4. Should I take all the medicine even though I feel fine? ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

5. How can I tell if this medicine is working? ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

6. Are there any tests I need while taking this medicine? ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

7. Are there any side effects from this medicine? ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

8. How long will I need to take this medicine? Do I need a refill? ________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________

9. Does my prescription drug plan cover this medicine? Is there a generic option available? ___________
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*You may be able to receive a 90-day supply and/or order your medicine through the mail! If you have questions about your prescription drug coverage, we can help. Visit www.emblemhealth.com/pharmacy or call Customer Service at the phone number on the back of your member ID card.