

THE
Educated Patient®

Rheumatoid Arthritis

RESOURCE GUIDE



A collection of resources that provide information and support for patients with rheumatoid arthritis and the professionals who treat them.

From the Publisher

Understanding and Managing Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis is an inflammatory autoimmune disease that causes pain, stiffness, and swelling in the joints. Although it is a chronic disease, rheumatoid arthritis is often characterized by periods of relapse or “flares” when symptoms worsen, followed by periods of remission when symptoms subside. The length of time between these cycles varies from patient to patient, with some experiencing flares every few weeks and others going months before encountering symptoms and pain.

It is estimated that over 1.3 million people in the United States have rheumatoid arthritis. Women are much more likely to be afflicted than men; about 75% of people diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis are women. Most people who develop the disease do so between the ages of 30 and 60; however, some people develop rheumatoid arthritis at a younger age.¹ Although scientists do not yet know the exact cause of rheumatoid arthritis, it is thought that there may be a genetic component that makes some people more likely to develop the disease. Researchers also think that environmental factors may play a role in triggering the disease.

There is no single test that can be used to establish a definitive diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis. However, there are several blood tests that are used to identify the presence of certain antibodies and other markers of inflammation. In some cases, X-rays may also be used to help confirm a diagnosis.

Effective treatment of rheumatoid arthritis depends on early diagnosis and treatment initiation to prevent joint damage and preserve function. Medical treatment of rheumatoid arthritis may involve several medications specific to a patient’s individual needs, including nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and corticosteroids to reduce pain and swelling, and disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs) to relieve symptoms and slow progression of the disease. Nonpharmacologic components of treatment include eating a healthy diet and engaging in regular exercise.

Learning as much as you can about rheumatoid arthritis and the treatments that are available is an important part of disease management. The more you understand about your disease and the ways in which it affects you, the better prepared you will be to work with your rheumatologist and other members of your health care team to manage your disease and improve your quality of life.

This guide features important information that will help you understand rheumatoid arthritis and prepare you to work with your physician. In addition to educating readers about the causes and effects of rheumatoid arthritis, this guide offers information on health, diet, and emotional support to help patients cope with their disease. The Frequently Asked Questions section addresses common concerns and questions often asked by patients. The Questions to Ask Your Physician section offers readers a list of questions they can ask their physician or other health care provider during office visits.

Included in this guide are descriptions of selected resources and assistance programs offered by various organizations. They provide credible informational resources, and many provide support in the form of financial assistance. Some of these organizations also provide a forum for patients and caregivers to engage in communities that communicate via online message boards, social media, and in-person meetings and seminars.

We hope this guide helps you begin coping emotionally and physically with rheumatoid arthritis, and we wish you success in understanding your condition, pursuing quality care with the help of your health care team, and achieving better control of the disease.

REFERENCE

1. American College of Rheumatology. Rheumatoid arthritis. http://www.rheumatology.org/practice/clinical/patients/diseases_and_conditions/rheumatoid_arthritis/. Accessed July 17, 2014.

Editorial & Production

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Operations and Clinical Affairs**
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Project Director
Christina Doong

Senior Clinical Projects Manager
Ida Delmendo

Clinical Projects Manager
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Sales and Marketing Coordinator
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Digital Media

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Web Editor, Social Strategy Manager
Silas Inman

Operations & Finance

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Jeff Brown



MH

Michael J. Hennessy Associates, Inc.

Office: Center at Princeton Meadows
Bldg. 300 • Plainsboro, NJ 08536
(609) 716-7777

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Information About Rheumatoid Arthritis

What Is Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)?

Arthritis encompasses a large group of musculoskeletal disorders. Within this family of disorders is *rheumatoid arthritis*, or RA. RA is a chronic and progressive inflammatory condition that tends to affect the small joints in the hands and feet.¹ While RA is not a curable condition, the symptoms and the rate at which the disease progresses can be controlled.

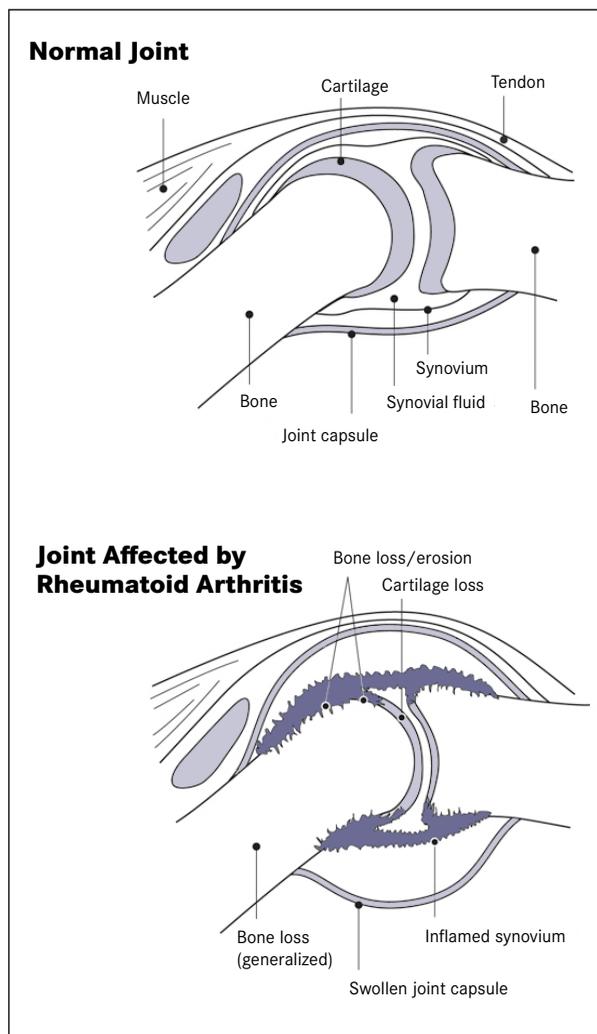
RA is an *autoimmune disease*, which means it involves an assault on your healthy cells by the body's own immune system. Ordinarily, our immune system is meant to defend our health by removing foreign invaders, such as viruses and bacteria. Once *antibodies* detect a potentially harmful cell, the immune system is activated, and immune cells gather at the site of injury and release chemicals that attack the threat. In an autoimmune disorder, the immune system remains activated and targets the body's own tissues for reasons that are not completely understood. In RA, the body's immune system injures a thin lining of tissue (the *synovium*) that covers the joints. Fluid then seeps in and accumulates within the joints, causing inflammation. This can lead to localized and potentially disabling pain that may ultimately result in a substantial loss of function. RA affects more than just the joints, as it is often characterized by inflammation throughout the body. This can result in damage to blood vessels and important organs, such as the heart and lungs.²

How Do You Get Rheumatoid Arthritis?

Although RA may be diagnosed at any age, symptoms most often appear between the ages of 30 and 60 years. If a member of your family has RA, you may be at an increased risk of having the disease. Most experts believe that both genetic and environmental factors contribute to the development of RA. Researchers have found that certain genetic markers are associated with a greater risk of developing the disease. However, not all people with these genes develop RA, and not all people with RA possess these genetic variations. Researchers are also studying other potential causes, such as bacteria or viruses, smoking, and the body's reaction to stressful triggers, such as physical or emotional trauma. Female hormones may also play a role. Women are nearly 3 times more likely than men to develop RA.^{1,2}

How Will I Know If I Have Rheumatoid Arthritis?

Symptoms can differ substantially from person to person and can even vary from day to day for a single individual. Joint stiffness that persists for hours in the morning may be a sign that you have RA.³ Because of the body's inflammatory



National Institutes of Health

response to the disorder, you may notice tenderness, warmth, swelling, and pain or a limited range of motion in the areas surrounding the joints involved. Joint involvement tends to be symmetrical—if a joint on 1 side of the body is affected, the parallel joint on the other side of the body may be involved as well.² Other symptoms include fatigue, loss of appetite, and low-grade fever.^{1,2}

To determine whether you have RA, your physician will obtain a medical history and perform a physical examination. He or she may look for lumps under the skin, known as *subcutaneous nodules*, and ask whether you have experienced fatigue or a general sensation of stiffness,

when these symptoms began, and whether these symptoms have changed over time. If RA is suspected, a blood sample will likely be taken to determine whether you have certain antibodies (ie, the anti-cyclic citrullinated peptide, or *anti-CCP antibody*), and/or high levels of *rheumatoid factor*—a key marker of inflammation. X-rays may also be needed to better visualize any loss of bone or joint cartilage.²

What Is Rheumatoid Factor?

Rheumatoid factor is a protein created by your immune system that can attack healthy tissues in your body. Measuring the amount of rheumatoid factor in the blood is a useful diagnostic tool in RA, as elevated levels are usually associated with an autoimmune disease. This test also helps distinguish RA from other forms of arthritis. However, high levels of rheumatoid factor in the blood are not always indicative of RA.⁴ It is also worth noting that a negative rheumatoid factor test is not enough to rule out RA, as some individuals with an autoimmune disease have normal rheumatoid factor levels. Approximately 20% of people with RA have low or undetectable rheumatoid factor levels.⁵

What Is the Anti-CCP Antibody?

An anti-CCP antibody test may be ordered to help diagnose RA, especially in an individual whose rheumatoid factor test is negative.⁵ The anti-CCP antibody is an *autoantibody*, meaning that it is directed against an individual's own cells. In RA, the immune system perceives certain proteins as foreign and signals the body to form anti-CCP antibodies against them. Knowing this sequence of events occurs in RA makes the detection of anti-CCP antibodies particularly useful in diagnosing the disease, especially in individuals who may have had a negative rheumatoid factor test.⁶

Other tests your physician might conduct include:

- **Blood tests:** Your physician may want to run additional blood tests to look for certain abnormalities and markers of inflammation.⁷
- **Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI):** An MRI can be used to look for joint damage, even during the very early stages of RA.^{7,8}
- **Synovial fluid analysis:** Your physician may check for an atypical buildup of fluid, and examine it for such abnormalities as unusual color or texture.⁵

If You Think You Have Rheumatoid Arthritis

Several effective treatments exist to help reduce RA's symptoms and delay the progression of the disease. It is common for people with RA to endure sporadic episodes of intense disease activity, which are known as *flares*. In other patients, the disease remains continuously active

and worsens over time. Goals for the management of RA are centered on achieving disease remission. Evidence shows that early diagnosis and aggressive treatment are the best means of slowing disease progression and preventing joint damage.²

Your physician may prescribe 1 or more medications to help manage your disease.² Medications used to treat RA are generally classified as follows:

- **Symptomatic therapies:** Medications known as *nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs*, or *NSAIDs*, and *corticosteroids* are often prescribed to provide symptom relief and lessen inflammation, thereby helping the swelling and stiffness that occur in RA. They do not stop or reduce the joint and organ damage that RA can cause, but they help make living with RA less painful.⁷
- **Disease-modifying therapies:** Medications known as *disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs)* can delay disease progression, helping individuals with RA achieve remission. Unlike symptomatic therapies, DMARDs work to delay the joint damage that RA can cause. A class of DMARDs, known as *biologic DMARDs*, act on elements of the immune system that are involved in the RA disease course.^{2,7,9}

Your Health Care Team

Along with your physician (also called your *primary care physician*, or *PCP*), who may be the first to discover that you have RA, your health care team may include a *rheumatologist*, *physical therapist*, *occupational therapist*, *orthopedic surgeon*, or a combination of these. Each has a specific role to play. You may not see all of them during the course of your care—it depends on your individual situation.¹⁰

What Is My Prognosis?

RA is a chronic, progressive disease, causing increased joint destruction and restricted movement over time. The time course and total extent of this disability varies substantially among individuals and can be controlled, often through the use of lifestyle modification and medication. Individuals with elevated levels of rheumatoid factor, the anti-CCP antibody, or subcutaneous nodules often present with more severe forms of the disease. People who develop RA earlier in life are more likely to experience more rapid disease progression.⁷

Having an accurate diagnosis as soon as possible after symptoms develop is associated with a better prognosis because early treatment minimizes joint damage and eases pain. Permanent joint damage may occur without proper treatment, so it is important that you maintain a healthy diet and active lifestyle and continue to take the medications your physician prescribes.

Health, Diet, and Emotional Support

Health

Managing RA involves both pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic modalities. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle will not only give you more energy and elevate your mood, but can also help delay the progression of your disease.^{2,11} Participating in physical activity on a consistent basis can help decrease fatigue, strengthen muscles and bones, and increase flexibility and stamina. Physical activity does not have to be strenuous, and you should try to engage in activity whenever your symptoms are under control.²

As always, it is important for your physician to be aware of—and approve of—any exercise plans before you begin. Your health care professional may want to create an exercise regimen for you, as certain activities shown to be beneficial in RA may be recommended over others that could potentially harm your joints.

Diet

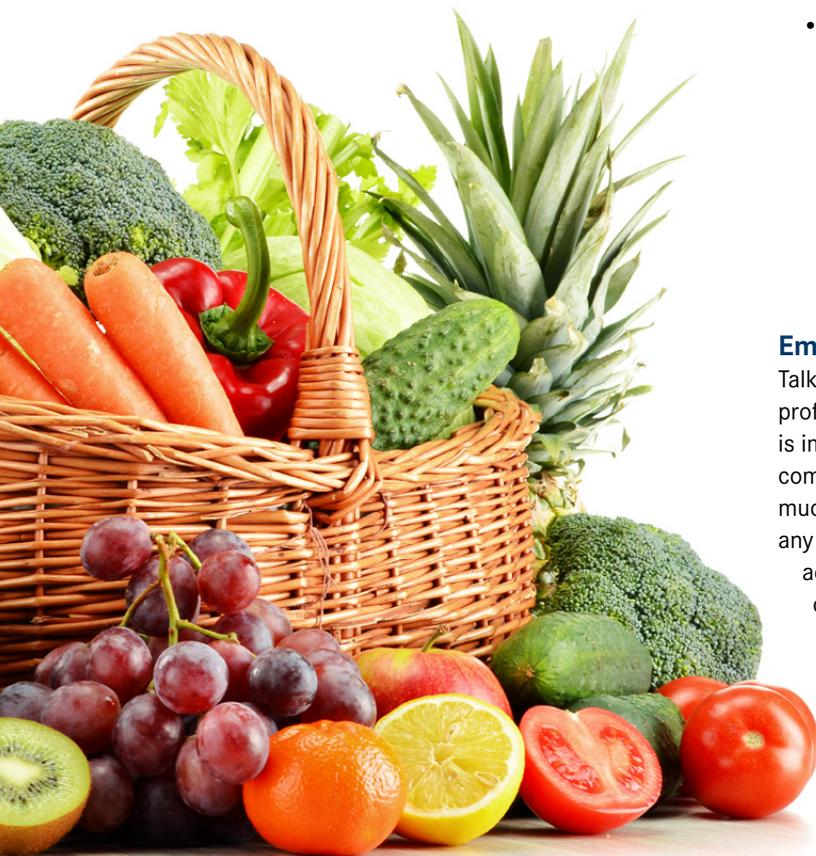
It is important to eat a balanced, healthy diet, which, according to the US Food and Drug Administration, should have a foundation in plant-based foods. Approximately two-thirds of your diet should come from fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Other recommendations include fat-free or low-fat dairy products and lean sources of protein.¹²

Although scientific studies have not proved that diet changes cause or relieve symptoms of RA, the evidence does suggest that a wide variety of foods can offer some protection against inflammation. These include the following:

- **Fish and other foods that contain omega-3 fatty acids:** Studies have shown that fish oil, found in herring, mackerel, trout, salmon, and tuna, can soothe tender joints and help alleviate morning joint stiffness.^{12,13}
- **Fiber from fruits, vegetables, and whole grains:** Adding fiber to the diet has been shown to reduce inflammation. Fresh or frozen strawberries in particular appear to offer benefit.¹²
- **Selenium and vitamin D:** People with RA have lower levels of selenium, an important dietary mineral. Selenium contains antioxidants, which are believed to help control inflammation. Vitamin D may also assist in RA management by helping to regulate the immune system. Good sources of vitamin D include eggs, fortified breads, cereals, and low-fat milk.¹² Always consult with your physician before taking supplements.

Emotional Support

Talking to your loved ones, caregiver, and/or health care professional about any concerns or fears you might have is important. Friends, family, and caregivers can provide comfort, motivation, and support. It also helps to learn as much as you can about the disease by asking your physician any questions you may have and also for guidance on additional resources. Once you know what to expect, you can discuss it with your family and with other health care professionals who help you manage your RA. In this guide, we've described a number of website resources to assist in getting you started with finding support, and how to contact your local Arthritis Foundation office to learn more about educational events and the Life Improvement Series of programs.²



Frequently Asked Questions

What is rheumatoid arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis, or RA, is a chronic inflammatory disorder that typically affects the small joints in your hands and feet. RA is an autoimmune disease, in which the body's immune system damages a thin membrane that covers the joints called the synovium. As a consequence of the damage, fluid builds up in the joints, which can lead to pain in the joints. Inflammation may occur elsewhere in the body as well.²

How common is rheumatoid arthritis?

Approximately 1.3 million people in the United States alone have RA, which is approximately 1% of the country's adult population.²

Who is at risk for rheumatoid arthritis?

RA can be diagnosed at any age, but symptoms are most likely to appear between the ages of 30 and 60 years. The condition is much more common in women than in men, and having a family member with RA can increase your risks for developing the disease.^{1,2}

What causes rheumatoid arthritis?

Most experts believe that a combination of genetic and environmental factors is involved. Current areas of research include bacteria and viruses, female hormones, smoking, and the body's reaction to stressful triggers, such as physical or emotional trauma.²

How do I know if I have rheumatoid arthritis?

Symptoms differ from person to person but include limited range of motion, tenderness, warmth, swelling, and pain in the areas surrounding the joints, and bumps under the skin. Some individuals also experience fatigue, loss of appetite, and low-grade fever.^{1,2}

How is rheumatoid arthritis managed?

RA is a chronic, progressive disease with no cure. Management of RA focuses on achieving remission, which are periods without any disease activity or symptoms. Medications used to treat RA include symptomatic and disease-modifying therapies.²

Is rheumatoid arthritis the same type of arthritis that commonly develops in older age?

RA is different from "wear-and-tear" arthritis (called *osteoarthritis*), which arises when the cartilage on the ends of your bones erodes as a consequence of time.¹



Glossary of Important Terms¹⁴⁻¹⁸

Antibody: A protein produced by the body to fight disease

Anti-CCP antibody: An antibody that targets cyclic citrullinated peptide

Autoantibody: An antibody that attacks the body's own tissues

Autoimmune disease: A disease characterized by an abnormal response of the immune system that results in damage to healthy tissues

Biologic DMARD: A type of medication that slows disease progression by mimicking the effects of substances naturally made by the body's immune system

Corticosteroid: A type of medication that has anti-inflammatory properties

Disease-modifying antirheumatic drug (DMARD): A type of medication that works to modify the course of RA by delaying its progression

Flare: A period of heightened disease activity that may be characterized by fatigue, fever, and/or swollen and painful joints

Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID): A type of steroid-free medication that works to reduce pain, fever, and inflammation

Occupational therapist: A health care professional who evaluates the impact of arthritis on and works to improve the performance of daily activities

Orthopedic surgeon: A physician who specializes in the surgical and nonsurgical treatment of bones, joints, and soft tissues, such as ligaments, tendons, and muscles

Physical therapist: A health care professional who incorporates exercise into the treatment of medical conditions

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA): An inflammatory autoimmune disease that causes pain, swelling, stiffness, and reduction of joint function

Rheumatoid factor: An autoantibody that is elevated in many individuals with RA

Rheumatologist: A physician who specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of arthritis and related diseases

Subcutaneous nodule: A lumpy growth under the skin

Synovium: A thin membrane that lines joints in the body and secretes synovial fluid

Questions to Ask Your Physician

What can I expect in the near future?

What parts of my body has the disease affected?

How will my disease be managed?

Can RA be cured?

What is a flare?

Is there anything I can do to prevent a flare?

Will my symptoms worsen over time?

What are some of the most serious complications associated with RA?

What will treatment be like?

Will I need to take medication?

Does having RA put me at higher risk for other problems?

What health care specialists should I see?

Are there any lifestyle changes I should make?

Will I need to modify my diet?

Will my ability to work, travel, or drive be affected?

Will I have physical limitations?

What kind of exercise is recommended?

How frequently should I exercise?

What support programs are available for my family and me?

Who can I speak with about my financial and/or insurance concerns?

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American College of Rheumatology— Patient Resources

www.rheumatology.org/Practice/Clinical/Patients/Information_for_Patients

The screenshot shows the American College of Rheumatology (ACR) website. At the top left is the ACR logo with the text "AMERICAN COLLEGE OF RHEUMATOLOGY EDUCATION • TREATMENT • RESEARCH". To the right are navigation links: NEWSROOM | ABOUT THE ACR | FIND A MEMBER | JOIN | LOGIN. Below these is a green bar with "Log in for members-only access." and a LOGIN button. A search bar labeled "Search the Site" is also present. A dark purple navigation bar contains links for MEMBERSHIP, PRACTICE MANAGEMENT, ADVOCACY, PUBLICATIONS, EDUCATION & CAREERS, RESEARCH, and FOUNDATION. The "PRACTICE MANAGEMENT" link is highlighted in green. Below this, a breadcrumb trail reads "PRACTICE MANAGEMENT > CLINICAL SUPPORT > PATIENT RESOURCES". The main content area is titled "Information for Patients" with a PRINT icon. Under "Patient Resources", there is a list of links: Diseases & Conditions, Medications, The Rheumatology Health Care Team, Additional Resources, Get Involved, Growing Up with Rheumatic Disease, Living Well with Rheumatic Disease, Rheumatology Advocacy, and Research in Rheumatology. Below this is a "Clinical Support" section with links for Position Statements, Clinician Researchers, and Practice Improvement Resources. The "Patient Fact Sheets" section contains three cards: "Diseases and Conditions" (hand icon), "Growing Up with Rheumatic Disease" (family icon), and "Medications, Treatments, Tests and Office Procedures" (syringe icon). A paragraph explains that the ACR has prepared educational materials for patients, available in English and Spanish, and intended to complement personal education from healthcare providers. A link to "contact us" is provided for additional questions.

ADDRESS:
2200 Lake Boulevard NE
Atlanta, GA 30319

CONTACT INFO:
Phone: (404) 633-3777
E-mail: acr@rheumatology.org

The American College of Rheumatology (ACR) represents more than 9400 rheumatologists and rheumatology health professionals around the world. The organization provides its members with education, research, advocacy, and practice support programs in an effort to advance rheumatology. The “Patient Resources” section of the ACR website provides extensive information for patients with rheumatoid arthritis or another rheumatologic disease.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ Information on rheumatoid arthritis
- ✓ Tips for coping
- ✓ Information on clinical trials
- ✓ Locate a rheumatologist feature
- ✓ Downloadable publications
- ✓ Additional resources

Rheumatology Research Foundation

www.rheumatology.org/foundation

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Rheumatology Research Foundation. At the top left is the logo with the tagline "Advancing Treatment | Finding Cures". To the right are links for "ACR HOMEPAGE" and "LOGIN", a "Log in for members-only access." button with a "LOGIN" sub-button, and a search bar. A prominent blue "DONATE NOW" button is on the right. Below the navigation bar are five menu items: "ABOUT US", "AWARDS & GRANTS", "RESEARCH", "BECOME A DONOR", and "PATIENTS & FAMILIES". The main banner features a photo of a doctor and a patient, with the headline "FOUNDATION FUNDS MORE THAN 110 AWARDS AND GRANTS". Below this is a sub-headline: "The people and projects being funded will advance the field of rheumatology and improve patient outcomes." There are two buttons: "FIND OUT WHO'S MAKING A DIFFERENCE" and "VIEW AVAILABLE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES". Below the banner are two columns: "MISSION" and "NEWS". The "MISSION" section states the foundation's goal to improve health through research and training. The "NEWS" section is divided into "Who We Are" and "What We Do". "Who We Are" describes the foundation as a 501(c)3 nonprofit and the largest private funding source. "What We Do" details the funding of awards and grants since 1985. To the right of "What We Do" is a graphic titled "90cents" showing 90 coins, with the text "90cents of every dollar donated to the Foundation is used to fund its awards and grants program."

ADDRESS:

2200 Lake Boulevard NE
Atlanta, GA 30319

CONTACT INFO:

Phone: (404) 633-3777

E-mail: foundation@rheumatology.org

The Rheumatology Research Foundation, an affiliate of the American College of Rheumatology, is a large private funding source for rheumatology research and training programs in the United States. The Foundation's mission is to advance research and training to improve the health of people with rheumatic diseases. Since its inception, the Foundation has funded more than \$116 million in awards and grants to more than 2300 medical and graduate students, residents, fellows, physicians, and health care professionals.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ Information on rheumatoid arthritis
- ✓ Information on research initiatives
- ✓ Downloadable publications
- ✓ E-Newsletters
- ✓ Patient stories

Arthritis Foundation

www.arthritis.org

The screenshot shows the Arthritis Foundation website homepage. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'Log In', 'Register', 'English', 'Español', and a search bar. Below this is a secondary navigation bar with links for 'OUR MISSION', 'LIVING WITH ARTHRITIS', 'MY COMMUNITY', 'CONNECT', 'SHOP', and 'DONATE'. A main navigation bar includes 'Home', 'Learn About Arthritis', 'Research', 'Take Action', 'Resources', 'Special Events', and 'About Us'. The main content area features a large banner with a photo of a smiling couple and the text: 'Welcome to the Arthritis Foundation. The largest nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention, control and cure of America's leading cause of disability.' Below the banner is a 'CLICK HERE FOR INFO' button. A 'Get Help' section offers to 'Access the resources you need in the fight against arthritis.' The page is divided into three columns: 'Living With Arthritis' (with sub-sections for Rheumatoid Arthritis, Osteoarthritis, and Juvenile Arthritis), 'Get Involved' (with a 'Find a Local Office' map and a zip code input field), and 'Featured News & Articles' (with two news items: 'Arthritis Foundation to Host National Juvenile Arthritis Conference' and 'Arthritis Foundation Continues to Monitor Health Benefits').

ADDRESS:

1330 West Peachtree Street
Suite 100
Atlanta, GA 30309

CONTACT INFO:

Phone: (404) 872-7100
E-mail: [Online](mailto:online@arthritis.org)

The Arthritis Foundation is dedicated to conquering arthritis by increasing education, outreach, research, and advocacy through a wide range of programs and services. The Foundation is “committed to raising awareness and reducing the unacceptable impact of arthritis.” Its goal is, by 2030, to reduce by 20% the number of people suffering from arthritis-related physical activity limitations.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ Information on rheumatoid arthritis
- ✓ Information on financial assistance
- ✓ Arthritis wellness tools
- ✓ Exercise routines
- ✓ Free publications
- ✓ E-Newsletters

Mayo Clinic—Rheumatoid Arthritis

www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/basics/definition/con-20014868

The screenshot shows the Mayo Clinic website interface. At the top left is the Mayo Clinic logo. A search bar is located next to it. On the right, there are links for 'Request an Appointment', 'Find a Doctor', 'Find a Job', and 'Give Now'. Further right are links for 'Log in to Patient Account', 'Translated Content', and social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Pinterest. Below this is a navigation menu with categories like 'PATIENT CARE & HEALTH INFO', 'DEPARTMENTS & CENTERS', 'RESEARCH', 'EDUCATION', 'FOR MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS', 'PRODUCTS & SERVICES', and 'GIVING TO MAYO CLINIC'. A prominent blue button says 'Request Appointment'. Below that, the page title is 'Rheumatoid arthritis' under the heading 'Diseases and Conditions'. A sub-menu includes 'Basics', 'Care at Mayo Clinic', 'In-Depth', 'Expert Answers', 'Expert Blog', 'Multimedia', 'Resources', and 'News From Mayo Clinic'. The 'Definition' section is active, showing text by Mayo Clinic Staff: 'Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic inflammatory disorder that typically affects the small joints in your hands and feet. Unlike the wear-and-tear damage of osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis affects the lining of your joints, causing a painful swelling that can eventually result in bone erosion and joint deformity.' To the right is an advertisement for ADHD with the text 'ADHD in children can cause learning difficulty in school.' and a 'Discover resources' button. At the bottom of the ad, it says 'Mayo Clinic is a not-for-profit organization.'

ADDRESS:

200 First Street, SW
Rochester, MN 55905

CONTACT INFO:

Phone: (507) 284-2511
E-mail: Online

Mayo Clinic's award-winning consumer website offers health information and self-improvement tools. Mayo Clinic's medical experts and editorial professionals bring you access to the knowledge and experience of Mayo Clinic for all your consumer health information needs, from cancer, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, and heart disease to nutrition, exercise, and pregnancy.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ Information on rheumatoid arthritis
- ✓ Tips for preparing for medical appointments
- ✓ Tips for coping
- ✓ Additional resources
- ✓ Blog

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Rheumatic_Disease/default.asp

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

Home Health Information Research Funding News & Events About Us

Find Health Topic: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z

You Are Here: Home > Health Info > Rheumatic Disease > Handout On Health: Rheumatoid Arthritis

Health Information

- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Find a Clinical Trial
- Journal Articles

Rheumatoid Arthritis

April 2013

Handout on Health: Rheumatoid Arthritis

This publication is for people who have rheumatoid arthritis, as well as for their family members, friends, and others who want to find out more about this disease. The publication describes how rheumatoid arthritis develops, how it is diagnosed, and how it is treated, including what people can do to help manage their disease. It also highlights current research efforts supported by the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) and other components of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Institutes of Health (NIH). If you have further questions after reading this publication, you may wish to discuss them with your doctor.

What Is Rheumatoid Arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an inflammatory disease that causes pain, swelling, stiffness, and loss of function in the joints. It occurs when the immune system, which normally defends the body from invading organisms, turns its attack against the membrane lining the joints.

Features of Rheumatoid Arthritis

- Tender, warm, swollen joints
- Symmetrical pattern of affected joints
- Joint inflammation *often* affecting the wrist and finger joints closest to the hand
- Joint inflammation *sometimes* affecting other joints, including the neck, shoulders, elbows, hips, knees, ankles, and feet
- Fatigue, occasional fevers, a loss of energy
- Pain and stiffness lasting for more than 30 minutes in the morning or after a long rest

Related Information

- What Is Rheumatoid Arthritis? (Fast Facts, easy-to-read)
- ¿Qué es la artritis reumatoide? (Esenciales: Hojas informativas de fácil lectura)
- What Is Rheumatoid Arthritis? (In Chinese 中國)
- What Is Rheumatoid Arthritis? (In Korean 한국어)
- What Is Rheumatoid Arthritis? (In Vietnamese bằng tiếng Việt)
- Juvenile Arthritis, Q&A
- Living With Arthritis
- Learn more about healthy aging at NIH SeniorHealth
- Autoimmune Diseases

Other Information

- Pediatric Rheumatology Clinic
- Order a NIAMS publication to be mailed

ADDRESS:

1 AMS Circle
Bethesda, MD 20892

CONTACT INFO:

Phone: (877) 226-4267
E-mail: NIAMSinfo@mail.nih.gov

The National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS), a part of the US Department of Health and Human Services' National Institutes of Health, supports research on the causes, treatment, and prevention of arthritis, musculoskeletal diseases, and skin diseases. Additionally, NIAMS supports the training of basic and clinical scientists to carry out research, and is committed to disseminating information on research progress in these diseases.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ Information on rheumatoid arthritis
- ✓ Information on clinical trials
- ✓ Links to journal articles
- ✓ Glossary of rheumatoid arthritis-related terms
- ✓ E-Newsletters

Rheumatoid Patient Foundation

rheum4us.org

The Rheumatoid Patient Foundation - Making rheum for us!
JOIN US. [Click here](#) to learn how you can become a member.
Your donations make the RPF possible. [Click here to donate now.](#)

Follow us    

Our vision is a world where no one suffers from Rheumatoid disease.
We understand RA.
Millions of us have fought the crippling pain and damage of Rheumatoid Disease with remarkable resilience. We face multiple procedures and harsh treatment side effects with optimism, humor, and compassion.
RA is a serious disease, but symptoms can be visibly subtle, making it difficult to understand. Lack of awareness of RA makes it even more isolating. Too often, even doctors doubt how much RA patients endure.
We understand because we are patients and caregivers who live with RA. Together we will transform the future for everyone diagnosed with the disease.

[Click Here to Download Copies of the Research Posters RPF Presented at the 2013 American College of Rheumatology Annual Meeting](#)

ADDRESS:

PO Box 236251
Cocoa, FL 32923

CONTACT INFO:

E-mail: katieb@rheum4us.org

The Rheumatoid Patient Foundation (RPF) was founded in 2011 with the advice and input of leaders in the rheumatoid arthritis community. RPF is dedicated to improving the lives of people with rheumatoid arthritis by creating public awareness about the nature of rheumatoid disease and developing resources that help support patients' health care decisions and encourage them to advocate for themselves and others. RPF advocates for quality health care, appropriate disability accommodations, applicability of scientific research, accurate media coverage, and fair governmental policies, and contributes to and promotes scientific discovery that leads to a cure.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ Information on rheumatoid arthritis
- ✓ Information about remission
- ✓ Downloadable publications
- ✓ Additional resources
- ✓ Blog

Global Healthy Living Foundation— CreakyJoints

www.creakyjoints.org

Bringing arthritis to its knees since 1999

Home Arthritis 101 Voices Advocacy About Us

Creaky Joints

JOIN
the CreakyJoints
Community
today!

Register

Seth addresses World Stem Cell Summit
CreakyJoints co-founder Seth Ginsberg takes part in world's flagship stem cell event

CJ News & Views

Rheumatoid Arthritis, unleashed & undiagnosed, almost destroys a life
A pain-and-fatigue wracked Jonathan loses his job, wife, home, community—and considers ending it all

Inspiration porn, stigma and the way out
Lene on why you should consider entering the Live Bold anti-stigma photo contest

CJ Bloggers & Correspondents

The Titanium Triathlete
The Titanium Triathlete

Special Guest Blogger RA Guy
Superhero friend RA Guy's permanent CJ special guest blogger spot

My Wobbly Path
A bicultural journalist, Katerina battles Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis creating change, served with

CONTACT INFO:
E-mail: Online

CreakyJoints is a national network of more than 56,000 people with arthritis and those who care about them. A community organized by the Global Healthy Living Foundation, CreakyJoints is committed to helping those with RA and other forms of arthritis improve their quality of life, with passion and even a touch of humor.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ Videos
- ✓ Articles
- ✓ Podcasts
- ✓ Score Your RA rewards program
- ✓ The Goal Machine mobile app
- ✓ Online community

Inspire

www.inspire.com

Inspire
Log in | Sign up | Contact us

Inspire in the news
Finding Support in Online...
A video by NPS Pharmaceuticals
[See more stories](#)

together we're betterSM Engaged. Authentic. Trusted.

Needing Help
good for you. me too. i haven't begun treatment but Gtown was being glib -
"we'er going to cure you!" and not addressing the questions ...
- in Head and Neck Cancer Alliance

Great Cancer Check-up
Very good news! Congratulations! Happy Dance Time ...
- in Ovarian Cancer National Alliance

Blood pressure
Mine gets low if it is really hot. Did you call your doc ...
- in WomenHeart

Vietnam Veterans with Bladder Cancer
Reported problems to my Dr. at age 64, finally diagnosed with bladder and
prostate cancer at age 66, radical at age 66. Just had a ...
- in Bladder Cancer Advocacy Network

Latest searches

- my child has mild cerebral palsy will he ever walk normal
- sensory processing disorder ehlers-danlos
- nodules on lungs sarcoidosis
- beta blockers and lactate threshold
- nodules on lungs sarcoidosis
- what does cervical cancer discharge smell like
- can you wash your stoma bag out
- j tube vs g tube
- neuroblate risks

Search for medical conditions and treatments

Learn more about us · Explore groups · Our principles · Our partners · Help

ADDRESS:

66 Witherspoon Street
Suite 402
Princeton, NJ 08540

CONTACT INFO:

Phone: (800) 945-0381
E-mail: team@inspire.com

Inspire was created with the belief that patient contributions to medical progress have been historically underappreciated, and that progress in medical research will result from involving patients as well as fully valuing their contributions. This privately held company partners with organizations to provide online patient communities in a safe, privacy-protected environment.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ Information on rheumatoid arthritis
- ✓ Create-your-own website feature
- ✓ Start an Inspire partner organization feature

Rheumatoid Connect

www.rheumatoidconnect.com

The screenshot shows the Rheumatoid Connect website. At the top, it says "Social Networks for Health Conditions" and "Visit Another Community". The main header includes the logo "rheumatoid connect", "Log In", and "Join Now" buttons. A search bar is labeled "Search Rheumatoid Connect". On the left, a navigation menu lists: Home, Discussions, News Articles, Product Reviews, Videos, Recipes, Living With Rheumatoid Arthritis, and Special Health Savings and Coupons. The main content area features a "Fresh information and real support. Fueled by an active, caring community." section with a "Join Now" button. Below this is a "Featured" article titled "Chronic Communication at Home: Teaming Up at Get-Togethers and Family..." by Dr. Gary, dated "Last Tuesday". The article text says: "When you have rheumatoid arthritis, social events can be challenging. Dr. Gary's tips can help you enjoy socializing without all the stress." There is a "Read more." link. To the right of the featured article is a "Sign up for our newsletter." form with an email input field and a "Submit" button. Below the newsletter sign-up is a "Vote" section with a "Woot! Yay!" graphic and the text "You make all the difference. We'll make all the badges." Underneath is a "Community Advocates" section featuring "Lana Barhum, Patient Advocate" with a "Read My Story" link. The "Recently Awarded Badges" section lists: "shelleyginger earned the You've Got Mail! badge.", "TReYk earned the Hugger badge.", and "Fussellid earned the Immigrant badge." At the bottom left of the main content area is an "Active Discussions" section with a "see more" link. It lists three discussion topics: "Struggles of RA Patients" with the comment "What a great lady! I love her!", "Rheumatoid Arthritis Remission" with the text "The term remission refers to a period when disease symptoms are reduced or no longer apparent. For RA patients...", and "Worried about side effects? How are you handling..." with the text "Oh wow! That's what John said after he read through the package insert from the new medication his physician prescribed..."

ADDRESS:

Alliance Health
9883 South 500 West
Sandy, UT 84070

CONTACT INFO:

Phone: (801) 355-6002
E-mail: info@alliancehealth.com

Rheumatoid Connect, owned and operated by Alliance Health, is a social health network that aims to empower people living with rheumatoid arthritis. Rheumatoid Connect's website helps connect patients and serves as a central location for members to converse about important news, treatment and product recommendations, and other rheumatoid arthritis-related topics.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ Online community
- ✓ News articles
- ✓ Rheumatoid arthritis product reviews
- ✓ Videos
- ✓ Recipes
- ✓ Special savings and coupons

The International Foundation for Autoimmune Arthritis

www.ifautoimmunearthritis.org



ADDRESS:

4055 West 138th Street
Los Angeles, CA 90250

CONTACT INFO:

Phone: (877) 609-4226

E-mail: info@IFAutoimmuneArthritis.org

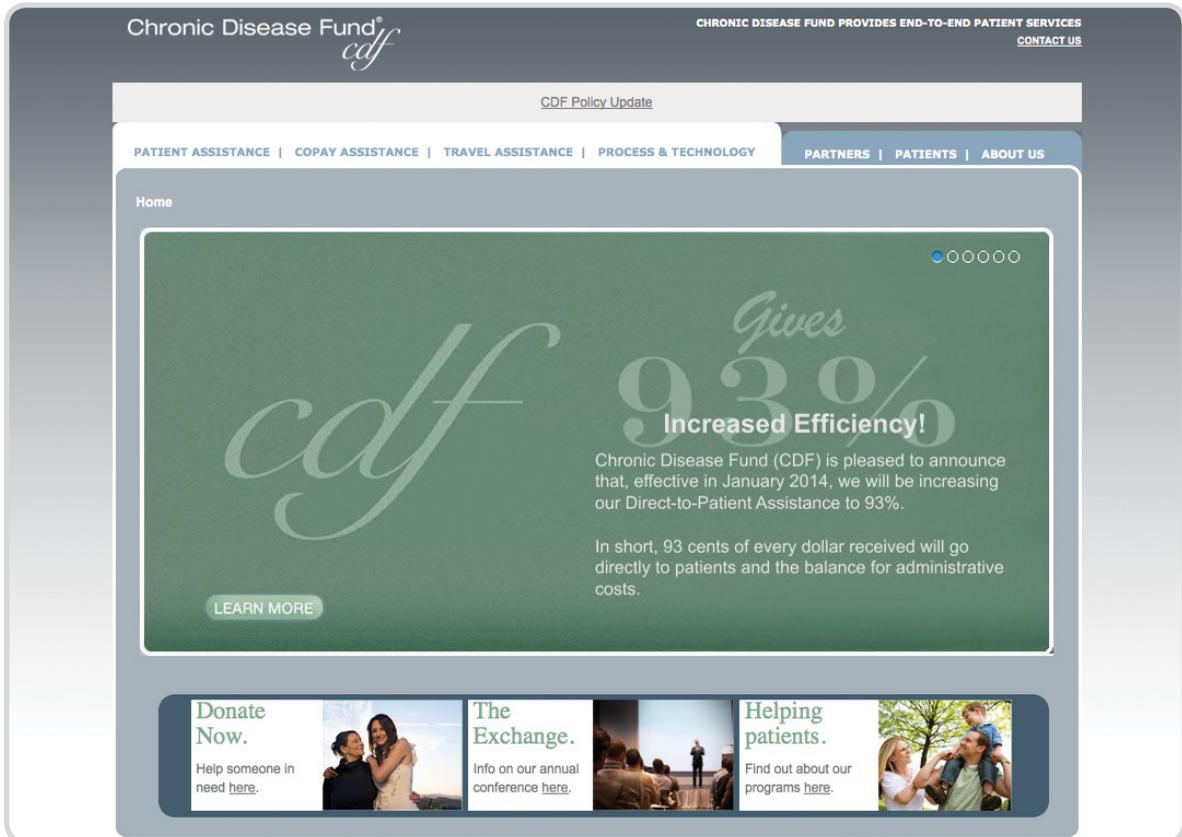
The International Foundation for Autoimmune Arthritis (IFAA), formerly known as the International Autoimmune Arthritis Movement, is committed to eliminating the adversity caused by autoimmune arthritis by uniting resources that will raise global awareness, providing wellness education and support, and promoting patient-centered research that will improve the quality of life of those affected by these diseases.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ IFAA Awareness Hotline
- ✓ Blog
- ✓ Patient education programs
- ✓ World Autoimmune Arthritis Day Internet community

Chronic Disease Fund

www.cdfund.org



ADDRESS:
6900 North Dallas Parkway
Suite 200
Plano, TX 75024

CONTACT INFO:
Phone: (877) 968-7233
E-mail: info@cdfund.org

The Chronic Disease Fund is an independent, non-profit charitable organization that helps rheumatoid arthritis patients throughout the United States who meet income qualification guidelines and have private insurance or a Medicare Part D plan but cannot afford the cost of their specialty therapeutics.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ Financial/copay assistance
- ✓ Online Patient Portal and therapy management tool
- ✓ Travel expense assistance

NeedyMeds

www.needymeds.org

HELPLINE 800-503-6897 CONTACT US EN ESPAÑOL

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Drug Pricing Calculator
Find drug prices and pharmacies
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RX GRP: 05360001
ID: NM0903150000
This is a drug discount program, not an insurance plan.

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Powered by MedSimple™

NeedyMeds Drug Discount Card App
• Download the card for savings
• Includes Pharmacy Finder
• Updated for iPhone and Android

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ID: NM0903150000
This is a drug discount program, not an insurance plan.

Save on Your Prescriptions
The NeedyMeds Drug Discount Card may save you up to 80% off the cost of your prescriptions, OTC medications and pet prescriptions purchased from a pharmacy. [Download a card](#) and start saving.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

HELPING YOU pay for your medicine Patient Assistance

ADDRESS:

PO Box 219
Gloucester, MA 01931

CONTACT INFO:

Phone: (800) 503-6897
E-mail: info@needymeds.org

NeedyMeds is a national non-profit organization that provides free information on programs to help people who can't afford the costs of medications and health care services. NeedyMeds is not a patient assistance program, but rather a source of information on thousands of programs that may be able to offer financial support to people in need.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ Prescription coverage programs
- ✓ Drug pricing calculator
- ✓ Mobile apps
- ✓ Webinars
- ✓ Blog
- ✓ Links for additional support

Partnership for Prescription Assistance

www.pparx.org

The screenshot shows the website's header with the PPA logo and "9TH ANNIVERSARY" text. A navigation bar includes "ABOUT US", "PRESCRIPTION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS", and "NEWS & MEDIA". A prominent "SCAM ALERT:" banner warns about impostors. A central testimonial features a photo of a man and text about his experience with heart attack medications. A "GET HELP NOW" button is positioned below the testimonial. To the right, there are buttons for "IMPORTANT INFORMATION for HIV/AIDS Patients" and a link for those affected by natural disasters. A footer section titled "What is the Partnership for Prescription Assistance?" provides a brief overview of the organization's mission.

CONTACT INFO:
E-mail: Online

The Partnership for Prescription Assistance helps qualifying patients without prescription drug coverage get the medicines they need for free or nearly free. The organization's mission is to increase awareness of patient assistance programs and boost enrollment of those who are eligible. The Partnership for Prescription Assistance serves as a single point of access to more than 475 public and private programs, including nearly 200 offered by biopharmaceutical companies. The organization has already helped millions of Americans get free or reduced-cost prescription medicines.

Resource Checklist

- ✓ Prescription coverage programs
- ✓ Copay assistance
- ✓ Medical supply assistance

Patient Education Resources

Website	Address	Contact
American College of Rheumatology—Patient Resources www.rheumatology.org/Practice/Clinical/Patients/Information_for_Patients	American College of Rheumatology 2200 Lake Boulevard NE Atlanta, GA 30319	Phone: (404) 633-3777 E-mail: acr@rheumatology.org
Arthritis Foundation www.arthritis.org	Arthritis Foundation 1330 West Peachtree Street Suite 100 Atlanta, GA 30309	Phone: (404) 872-7100 E-mail: Online
Mayo Clinic—Rheumatoid Arthritis www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/rheumatoid-arthritis/basics/definition/con-20014868	Mayo Clinic 200 First Street, SW Rochester, MN 55905	Phone: (507) 284-2511 E-mail: Online
National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases www.niams.nih.gov/Health_Info/Rheumatic_Disease/default.asp	National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases 1 AMS Circle Bethesda, MD 20892	Phone: (877) 226-4267 E-mail: NIAMSinfo@mail.nih.gov
Rheumatoid Patient Foundation rheum4us.org	Rheumatoid Patient Foundation PO Box 23625 1 Cocoa, FL 32923	E-mail: katieb@rheum4us.org
Rheumatology Research Foundation www.rheumatology.org/foundation	Rheumatology Research Foundation 2200 Lake Boulevard NE Atlanta, GA 30319	Phone: (404) 633-3777 E-mail: foundation@rheumatology.org

Support Group Resources

Website	Address	Contact
Global Healthy Living Foundation—CreakyJoints www.creakyjoints.org		E-mail: Online
Inspire www.inspire.com	Inspire 66 Witherspoon Street Suite 402 Princeton, NJ 08540	Phone: (800) 945-0381 E-mail: team@inspire.com
Rheumatoid Connect www.rheumatoidconnect.com	Alliance Health 9883 South 500 West Sandy, UT 84070	Phone: (801) 355-6002 E-mail: info@alliancehealth.com
The International Foundation for Autoimmune Arthritis www.ifautoimmunearthritis.org	The International Foundation for Autoimmune Arthritis 4055 West 138th Street Los Angeles, CA 90250	Phone: (877) 609-4226 E-mail: info@IFAutoimmuneArthritis.org

Financial Assistance Resources

Website	Address	Contact
Chronic Disease Fund www.cdfund.org	Chronic Disease Fund 6900 North Dallas Parkway Suite 200 Plano, TX 75024	Phone: (877) 968-7233 E-mail: info@cdfund.org
NeedyMeds www.needy meds.org	NeedyMeds, Inc PO Box 219 Gloucester, MA 01931	Phone: (800) 503-6897 E-mail: info@needy meds.org
Partnership for Prescription Assistance www.pparx.org		E-mail: Online

