

# Health care tips

## Managing rheumatoid arthritis with prescription medication

### What is rheumatoid arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic disease that can damage joints like knees and elbows. It can also cause pain, swelling and stiffness in your joints. It's important to know what you and your doctor can do to help manage your rheumatoid arthritis.

### Is there medication I can take for rheumatoid arthritis?<sup>1,2</sup>

There are many types of prescription medication that treat rheumatoid arthritis. They can slow down the effects of the disease. When taken as directed by your doctor, these medications can:

- Prevent or slow joint damage
- Relieve joint pain
- Reduce swelling
- Help improve your quality of life

It's important to treat rheumatoid arthritis early. That's because joint damage can happen in the first two years of the disease. You should start taking a prescription medication within three months of being told you have rheumatoid arthritis.

### What prescription medications treat rheumatoid arthritis?

Medication to treat rheumatoid arthritis can be taken by mouth, a shot or put directly into your blood (infusion). Some common oral rheumatoid arthritis medications are listed below. The brand name is listed first, followed by the active ingredient or generic name in parentheses.

- Plaquenil<sup>®</sup> (hydroxychloroquine)
- Arava<sup>®</sup> (leflunomide)
- Rheumatrex,<sup>®</sup> Trexall<sup>®</sup> (methotrexate)
- Azulfidine<sup>®</sup> (sulfasalazine)

### What can I do to manage my rheumatoid arthritis?



Get the right amount of rest and exercise



Eat healthy foods



Reduce stress on your joints



Limit alcohol use



Stop smoking

If common rheumatoid arthritis medications don't work well for you, biologic medications can be used. Most biologic medications are injected with a needle. Xeljanz® (tofacitinib) is the only biologic medication taken by mouth. Common rheumatoid arthritis medications and biologic medications can be used together to get better results. Biologic medications include:

- Actemra® (tocilizumab)  
(golimumab)
- Cimzia® (certolizumab pegol)
- Enbrel® (etanercept)
- Humira® (adalimumab)
- Kineret® (anakinra)
- Orencia® (abatacept)
- Remicade® (infliximab)
- Rituxan® (rituximab)
- Simponi®
- Xeljanz® (tofacitinib)

## What are the next steps?

Talk to your doctor about taking medication for your rheumatoid arthritis. Here are some questions to ask:

- Should I take a medication for rheumatoid arthritis?
- Which medication will work the best for me?
- What are some side effects I may have when taking these medications?

### National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases

1-877-226-4267, TTY 1-301-565-2966 | [niams.nih.gov](https://niams.nih.gov)

**Arthritis Foundation** | 1-800-283-7800 | [arthritis.org](https://arthritis.org)

<sup>1</sup>Furst DE, Keystone EC, So AK, et al. *Updated consensus statement on biologic agents for the treatment of rheumatic diseases, 2012*. Ann Rheum Dis. 2013 Apr;72 Suppl 2:ii2-32.

<sup>2</sup>Clinical Pharmacology website. *clinicalpharmacology-ip.com*. Accessed November 10, 2017.

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