**Rheumatoid arthritis** is a chronic inflammatory illness. It is an autoimmune disease in which the immune system attacks normal tissue components as if they were invading pathogens. This illness affects about one percent of the world’s population. It often begins between ages 25 and 50, and is more common in women.

### What are its Symptoms?

Inflammations primarily attack the linings of the joints. Hands and feet are most common, but any joint lined by a membrane may be involved, even those of blood vessels, the heart and lungs. The inflammation can be controlled by medication. If not controlled the joints may become deformed.

It usually asserts itself over a period of a few months, but might arise in a period of days. Rapid onset, does not imply a greater risk of disease progression. Some may experience extreme pain while others may not, and symptoms often cycle between severe and light. Symptoms include:

- **Joint swelling** - Especially found in the small joints of the hands and feet.
- **Joint tenderness, stiffness, and pain.** Found most prevalent in the morning.

### What are the Risk Factors?

Women suffer from 2-3 times more than men. Family members have an increased risk of developing the disease. The siblings of severely affected rheumatoid arthritis patients are at highest risk.

### How is Rheumatoid Arthritis diagnosed?

Most sufferers have antibodies called “rheumatoid factors” in their bloodstream that play a part of the inflammatory process. Their presence help confirm a doctor’s diagnosis. However, rheumatoid factor is not a definitive test, as other signs and symptoms must be present for the diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis to be made. Additionally, rheumatoid factor is also found in cases of chronic infection and in some other types of autoimmune disease.

### Affects of Rheumatoid Arthritis?

- **Hardened Lumps.** About 25% of rheumatoid arthritis patients develop hardened lumps under the skin. These hardened lumps are called rheumatoid nodules, usually developing in the later course of the disease. Often, the nodules are found on bony sites such elbows, hips, heels, and back of the head. However, they can also form under the skin in the finger, toe or heel pads, or in tendons.
- **Cartilage & Bone destruction.** If joint inflammation persists, cartilage and bone destruction can occur and joints may become deformed and immobile. Inflammation and deformity are most often seen in the hands and feet, but can occur in other joints.
- **Severely affected people** may also experience weight loss, low-grade fever, and a general malaise because of the disease's effects on the whole body.

### How is it treated?

Rest, supporting or splinting of affected joints and exercise programs. Good nutrition also very important as patients with a more advanced disease often experience anemia and weight loss.

Medication to control pain and stiffness and reduce the risk of joint deformity.

### Outlook on Rheumatoid Arthritis?

With proper treatment and early diagnosis, many people with rheumatoid arthritis can prevent or delay the more debilitating complications of the disease.

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