

# Recognise, Respond, Relieve, – Rheumatoid Arthritis



**Anybody can develop rheumatoid arthritis. It can develop at any age in adults but is more common in people in their 40s and 50s. It is two to three times as common in women than it is in men.**

## What is rheumatoid arthritis?

Rheumatoid arthritis is one of the major chronic diseases in Scotland and it affects an estimated 37,000 Scots.

It affects joints and sometimes other parts of the body. It causes swelling, stiffness and pain in joints, which can result in difficulties with many aspects of everyday life, such as washing and dressing, housework, cooking and gardening, participation in hobbies and sports, walking, childcare and the ability to work effectively.

## Why is it important to treat early?

If not treated early, rheumatoid arthritis can cause severe disability. It can cause irreversible joint damage, tendon rupture and loss of muscle. These gradually affect the range of movement of joints, which in turn has an impact on quality of life.

People may experience effects, such as morning joint stiffness lasting longer than 30 minutes, chronic fatigue, weight loss or fever. It can affect the lungs so that people experience breathlessness. Other problems may include inflammation in the eye or heart.

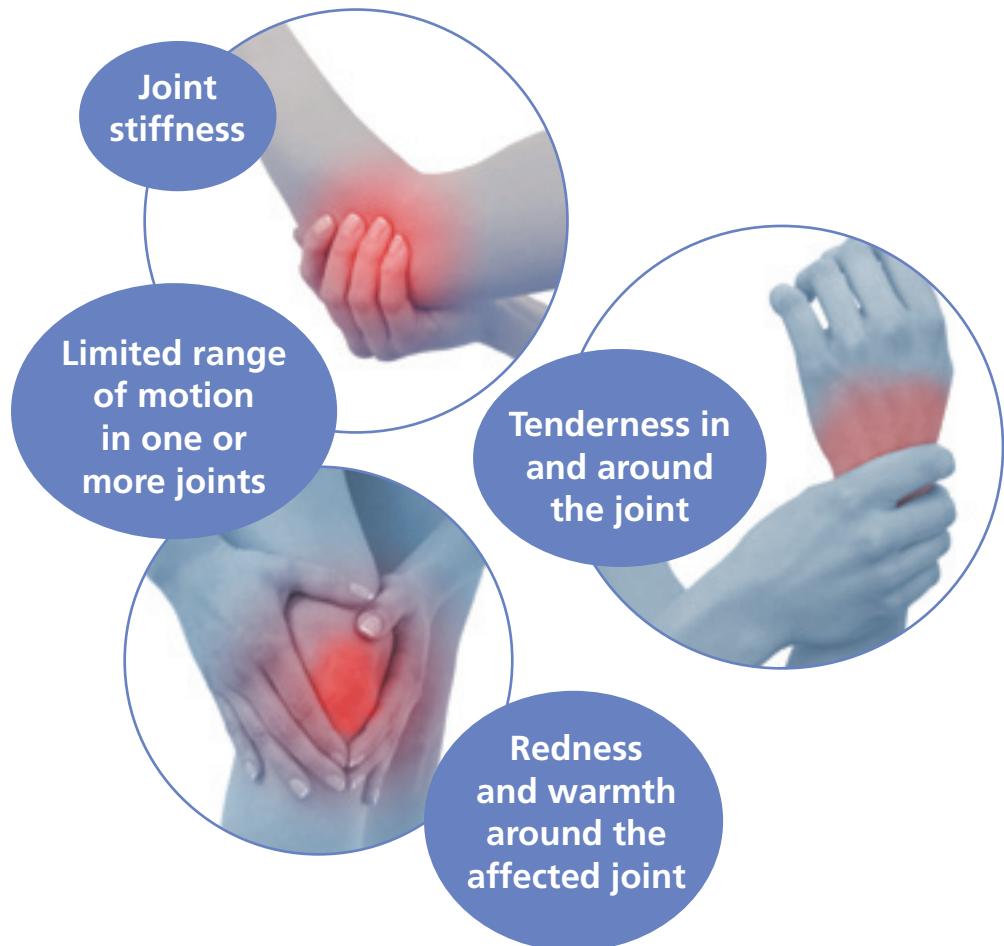
If you have rheumatoid arthritis you are more at risk of heart attack, stroke, some types of cancer and fractures due to osteoporosis.

The contents of this page is based on information from  
[www.scotphn.net/projects/previous\\_projects/rheumatoid\\_arthritis](http://www.scotphn.net/projects/previous_projects/rheumatoid_arthritis)

## Recognise

Early signs of rheumatoid arthritis:

- Early morning joint stiffness lasting more than 30 minutes.
- Persistent swelling and tenderness of one or more joints, especially hand joints.
- Limited range of motion in one or more joints.
- Redness and warmth around the affected joint.



## Respond

See your GP as soon as possible if you notice any of these symptoms.

Early identification and treatment of rheumatoid arthritis leads to better results for the patient. There is a 'window of opportunity' when early therapy can result in long-term, and for some people, drug-free remission. So if you have symptoms you should make an appointment to see your GP as soon as possible.



## Relieve

If your GP thinks the symptoms are rheumatoid arthritis they will refer you to specialist services for the appropriate treatment to:

- relieve symptoms
- improve joint function
- slow progression of the disease.

Best practice suggests that your GP should refer you to a rheumatology department within four weeks and it should take no longer than six weeks for you to be seen. Once you've been referred, you will be seen by a specialist doctor and members of a multi-disciplinary team who will do four things as part of your treatment:

1. Control and reduce inflammation of joints through prescription of a range of drugs (anti-inflammatories, disease-modifying drugs and occasionally steroids).
2. Control any pain you have.
3. Improve joint function (by providing advice on exercise, setting goals, assistive devices, diet, improving your work environment, foot care, etc).
4. Help you to manage your rheumatoid arthritis in everyday life.

## **Helpful contacts**

**NHS 24** provides comprehensive up-to-date health information and self-care advice for people in Scotland.

**[www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)**

**NHS Choices** is the UK's biggest health website and gives all the information you need to make choices about your health.

**[www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Pages/HomePage.aspx)**

**Arthritis Care** supports people with all forms of arthritis. It offers practical support and information.

Helpline: **0808 800 4050**

General enquiries: **020 7380 6500**

Website: **[www.arthriticcare.org.uk](http://www.arthriticcare.org.uk)**

**Arthritis Research UK** is the charity leading the fight against arthritis by funding high class research, and providing information and campaigning.

Website: **[www.arthritisresearchuk.org](http://www.arthritisresearchuk.org)**

**National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS)** focuses specifically on providing support, help and information for people with rheumatoid arthritis and juvenile idiopathic arthritis, their families, friends and carers, and health professionals with an interest in rheumatoid arthritis.

Helpline: **0800 298 7650**

General enquiries: **0845 458 3969/01628 823524**

Website: **[www.nrash.org.uk](http://www.nrash.org.uk)**

**Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance (ARMA)** is the umbrella association body providing a collective voice for the arthritis and musculoskeletal community in the UK.

Phone: **020 7842 0910/11**

Website: **[www.arma.uk.net](http://www.arma.uk.net)**