

# Quick Facts about RA

RA is a progressive disease which causes chronic inflammation of the joints<sup>1</sup>

RA is one of a group of conditions classified as autoimmune diseases, where the body mistakenly attacks its own immune system<sup>2</sup>

It is estimated that 5 million people suffer from RA in the seven major markets, 9 that is 0.3% to 1% of the general population<sup>10</sup>

## ► Fact sheet

### What is rheumatoid arthritis (RA)?

RA is a progressive disease which causes chronic inflammation of the joints. It generally affects the smaller joints in the body such as hands, wrists, feet and ankles; however the systemic nature of the condition means that it can also affect the body as a whole, including internal organs and the vascular system.<sup>1</sup>

RA is one of a group of conditions classified as autoimmune diseases, where the body mistakenly attacks its own immune system.<sup>2</sup> In RA, inflammatory processes target the tissue that surrounds each joint known as the synovium. This leads to swelling and damage of cartilage and bones of the synovial-lined joints.<sup>1</sup>

### Who is affected by RA?

Prevalence of RA is higher in developed countries, and amongst women.<sup>3</sup> Although RA can affect people of all ages, the onset of the disease usually occurs between 30-50 years of age.<sup>4</sup>

### What causes RA?

Doctors are still unable to pinpoint the exact cause of RA, though it is thought that genetic, environmental and hormonal factors all play a role.<sup>5,6</sup>

### Genetics

People with specific genetic markers are at an increased risk of developing RA, but having a gene that predisposes RA does not always lead to the development of the disease.<sup>5</sup>

### Environmental

Many scientists believe that there are environmental factors that can trigger the development of RA in susceptible individuals. These triggers, which lead to the immune system attacking the healthy synovium, the single cell layer that regulates transport between the joint cavity and its surrounding tissue, are thought to be bacterial and/or viral.<sup>6</sup>

### Hormonal

Women get rheumatoid arthritis two to three times more often than men and their RA typically goes into remission when they get pregnant.<sup>5</sup> Women develop RA more often than expected in the year after pregnancy, and symptoms can increase after a baby is born. These facts lead researchers to believe that gender might play a role in the development and progression of RA. Many are trying to understand the effects female hormones might have in the development of RA. Currently, there are limited answers to these questions.<sup>5</sup>

### Symptoms and associated conditions

Symptoms of RA may come and go and vary in severity from patient to patient. The main symptoms include:<sup>1,7,8</sup>

- Joint stiffness
- Joint pain
- Swelling
- Redness and warmth around the area affected
- Reduction in mobility
- Appearance of nodules or lumps under the skin
- Deformity of joints

Patients often experience symmetrical symptoms, whereby any symptoms felt on one side of the body are reflected in the same joints on the other side.<sup>7,8</sup> These symptoms often lead to permanent damage of joints and bones. As this damage occurs, patients may find their movement becomes more restricted, and this can lead to difficulty in undertaking even the simplest everyday tasks such as combing hair, turning a doorknob or taking a walk.<sup>7</sup>

RA patients are also at a higher risk of developing other conditions, in particular heart disease and stroke.<sup>1,3</sup> There is no clear reason why this should be the case, however limited of exercise and mobility are risk factors for developing many of these conditions.<sup>1</sup>

## How is RA diagnosed?

Diagnosis of RA is not always easy, since initial symptoms may be subtle and occur gradually, and early stage RA shares a number of symptoms with other musculoskeletal diseases. There is also no one clear way to diagnose RA, so the physician has to rely on a combination of medical history, physical examinations and laboratory tests including blood tests and x-rays / imaging techniques.<sup>1</sup>

Early diagnosis is important as joint damage begins to occur within the first two years after diagnosis disease.<sup>1</sup> There is currently no cure for RA, and as such treatment goals centre on disease management.<sup>1</sup>

**For more information on  
rheumatoid arthritis visit:  
[www.ucb.com](http://www.ucb.com)**

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