



YOUR GUIDE TO

# RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

MUSCULOSKELETAL

## Contents

What is rheumatoid arthritis? .....	3
What treatment can I receive? .....	4
What exercises should I do? .....	5
<b>Exercises</b> .....	6
Stretching - phase 1 .....	6
Motion - phase 2 .....	8
Strengthening - phase 3 .....	9

## Introduction

**Please take note of the following before starting any of the exercises in this guide:**

- The information contained in this guide is intended to assist in managing your recovery.
- This guide is based on the latest medical research in the field and contains the best advice available to the best of our knowledge.
- This guide is complimentary to other medical services and is not intended as a substitute for a health care provider's consultation.
- Never disregard medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something that you have read in this guide.

● Many people have found quick and lasting relief from their rheumatoid arthritis related symptoms by acting upon the information provided, but everyone decides for themselves what to do with this information. If you have any concerns about a particular exercise in relation to your specific situation, please consult your health professional for further advice.

**When consulting your health professional, it is wise to take this guide with you to show them.**

## What is rheumatoid arthritis?

**Rheumatoid arthritis** is a chronic, inflammatory disease that usually involves multiple joints (e.g. those of the wrist, hand, elbow and knee) and may affect the organ systems (such as heart, lungs, skin and nervous system). **It affects 1% - 2% of the population** but the prevalence increases with age. Women are affected two to three times as often as men, and it commonly affects younger women aged between 20-50 years.

The condition leads to a **progressive destruction of joints**. The synovium (connective tissue around the joint) becomes much thicker and changes its character. The inflammatory cells start eroding the cartilage and bone, fluid accumulates and the joint swells (see below). Eventually, the cartilage, bone, and ligaments of the joint erode, causing deformity, instability, and scarring within the joint. Joint involvement is generally symmetrical (i.e. affects both sides of the body).



People with rheumatoid arthritis usually have 'flare-ups' separated by periods of time when symptoms are less severe. During the 'flare-ups' joints are hot, swollen and stiff.

## What treatment can I receive?

### DRUG TREATMENT

- **Paracetamol** based pain killers are usually prescribed by doctors to help with pain management.
- **Anti-inflammatory drugs** are usually prescribed to control the destructive inflammatory process.
- **Steroids** such as cortisone (injections and tablets) are also used to manage pain and inflammation.
- Other commonly used drugs include sulphasalazine and methotrexate.
- **Ice/heat therapy** may help to relieve pain.

### DIET

There is **no evidence that special diets can help with rheumatoid arthritis**. However it is important to eat a healthy balanced diet and to avoid excessive weight gain. Added weight will put more pressure on your joints and may greatly aggravate the condition.

### EXERCISE

**Exercise can play a significant role** in easing pain caused by rheumatoid arthritis. The main goals in rehabilitation of individuals with rheumatoid arthritis are firstly the prevention of functional decline, and then to maximise strength, flexibility, endurance and mobility. Aerobic exercise is preferred to non-aerobic exercise, and dynamic exercise that allows gentle movement of the joints is greatly beneficial.

In severe cases non weight bearing exercises, like water aerobics, are preferred in order to take excess strain off the joints.

# What exercises should I do?

- Range of movement (ROM)/ stretching exercises
- Strengthening exercises
- Aerobic exercises such as cycling, swimming, water aerobics and walking. It is suggested that you do aerobic exercise for 20-30 minutes, three times a week.

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 1 Because many people with rheumatoid arthritis have morning stiffness, the best time for them to exercise may be later in the day.
- 2 Stretching/warm-up/ROM exercises should be used daily, even on the days when the disease flare-up and activity is undesirable.
- 3 A daily strengthening, flexibility and ROM routine should be learnt.
- 4 Avoid overstretching.
- 5 Select shoes and insoles for maximum shock absorption during weight-bearing activities.
- 6 If necessary, accumulate exercise dose in several sessions throughout the day. For example three sets of 10 minute exercises are preferred to 30 minutes continuous exercise.
- 7 Set time goals, rather than distance goals, to encourage a controlled pace of activity.

8 Avoid activities that cause increased joint pain lasting more than an hour or two after exercise. This includes daily activities e.g. washing up, ironing etc.

9 Some post-exercise soft tissue discomfort may be expected.

## Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic condition.

Ultimately, you are responsible for the management of your disease. By avoiding activities that will cause flare-ups and participating in a regular exercise programme, inflammation and pain can be prevented and controlled.

The information in this leaflet comes from extensive research done by IPRS and our own experience and results. The following are user friendly websites to gain more information:

- **National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society** <http://www.nras.org.uk>
- **Arthritis Foundation** <http://www.arthritis.org>

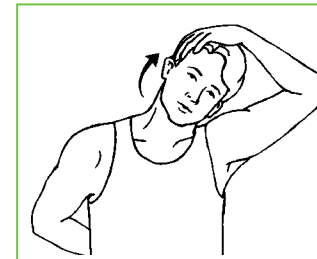
# Exercises phase 1

When first starting out on an exercise programme find a level that you are comfortable with. Do the exercises gently and progress slowly. You will know if you have done too much if you feel pain for more than an hour or two

after exercise. Adapt your exercise programme when you have 'bad' days. For example, only do the stretches and range of movement exercises and leave the strengthening exercises for another day.

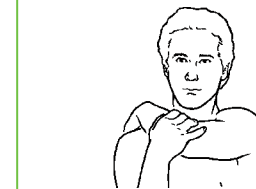
## STRETCHING EXERCISES

- Repeat each of these stretches two times for at least 30 seconds
- Hold a steady stretch, do not bounce and do not force into pain
- Breathe normally during all exercises



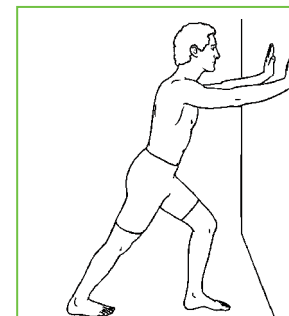
### NECK STRETCH

Place one arm behind your back. Bend head to opposite side so that your ear goes towards your shoulder. A stretch should be felt in the side of the neck. If a further stretch is required, use your opposite hand to gently pull your head towards your shoulder.



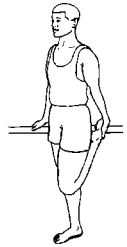
### SHOULDER STRETCH

Gently pull on your elbow with the opposite hand until a stretch is felt in your shoulder. Keep your elbow bent for the first 15 seconds and then straighten the arm for the next 15 seconds.



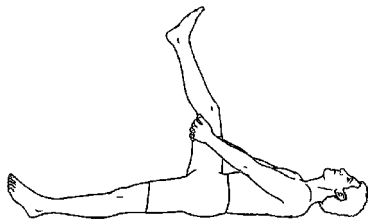
### CALF STRETCH

Place both your feet in a line behind one another with your toes facing forward. Place both hands on the wall, keeping your back leg straight. Bend your front leg slowly while keeping the heel of your back leg firmly on the ground. Hold for 15 seconds, and then slowly bend the knee of your back leg, while keeping your heel on the ground. Hold this for the next 15 seconds.



### QUADRICEPS STRETCH - ASSISTED

Rest your foot on a chair. Gently push your hips forward. A stretch should be felt at the front of the thigh.



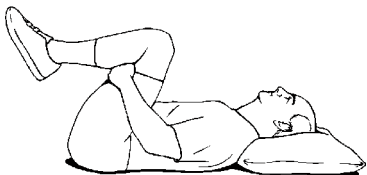
### HAMSTRING STRETCH - SUPINE

Lying on your back supporting your thigh, bend knee and slowly straighten knee until a stretch is felt in the back of your thigh.



### MID BACK STRETCH

Push chest toward floor, reaching forward as far as you can. Keep your buttocks firmly on your heels while performing the stretch.



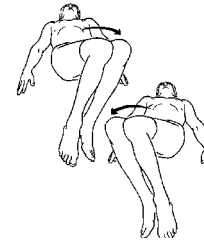
### DOUBLE KNEE TO CHEST STRETCH

Pull both knees into your chest until a comfortable stretch is felt in the lower back. Keep your back relaxed.

## Exercises phase 2

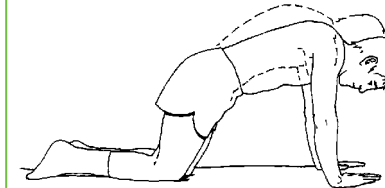
### MOTION EXERCISES

- Repeat each exercise ten times
- Move slowly and in a comfortable range
- Breathe normally during all exercises



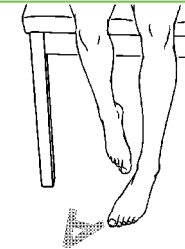
### LUMBAR ROTATION IN NON-WEIGHT-BEARING

Slowly move knees from side to side in a small, pain-free range of motion while keeping your knees together. Allow lower back to rotate slightly.



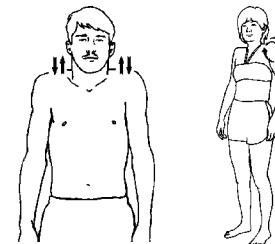
### CAT CURL

On all fours, tuck chin and tighten stomach, arching back towards ceiling. Hold each stretch/curl for only 1 or 2 seconds then relax and move into the next stretch/curl in a controlled manner. Repeat several times.



### ANKLE AND WRIST ALPHABET

Using your ankle and foot only, trace the letters of the alphabet while your foot is hanging free. Perform A to Z. Repeat this using your hand and wrist.



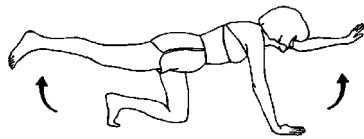
### SHOULDER ROLLS AND SHRUGS

Roll both shoulders forwards. Make big movements. Do not move the chest. Keep the spine straight. Repeat, rolling shoulders backwards. Repeat, lifting both shoulders to ears (shrugs).

# Exercises phase 3

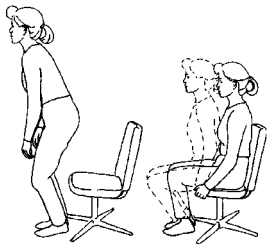
## STRENGTHENING EXERCISES

- Repeat each exercise ten times
- Do each exercise slowly
- Breathe normally during all exercises



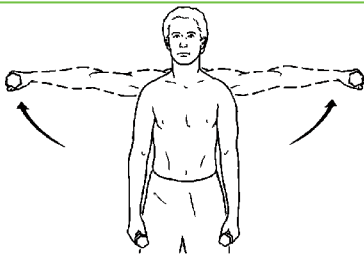
### “SUPERMANS”

Raise your opposite arm and leg. Do not arch neck. Keep your back straight and hips and shoulders level.



### SITTING TO STANDING

With good lower back posture, tighten abdominal muscles and come to a standing position.



### PROGRESSIVE RESISTIVE EXERCISES

Raise arms out to the side of your body to shoulder height. Raise arms out in front of your body to shoulder height. Using light weights is optional. These exercises can be done without weights.

# Contact us

This guide is designed to assist you in the self-management of your injury/condition.

We are here to assist your recovery in the shortest but safest possible time. If you have any uncertainties or queries regarding the information, please do not hesitate to contact us on:

Phone 017890400999 / 07870166861  
[www.mdphysiotherapy.co.uk](http://www.mdphysiotherapy.co.uk)