

# Understanding Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA)



Use this guide to gain a better understanding of RA and how it affects the people who live with it. If you know someone who has RA, it's important for you to be as open and supportive as possible. Research shows that a strong support system can actually help improve RA. For more information, visit [www.RISEsupport.com](http://www.RISEsupport.com).

## RA is more than just aches and pains

Common symptoms of RA include pain, stiffness, swelling, and fatigue. But permanent joint damage and deformity may happen over time.



**“My husband and I used to own an antique shop, but after my diagnosis, we had to sell. On my worst days, I could barely lift a picture frame, let alone manage the shop.”**  
—Jo Ann, living with RA since 1993

## RA is different from other types of arthritis, including osteoarthritis

RA is a type of autoimmune disorder that occurs when the immune system attacks the body's joints. Osteoarthritis, however, occurs when the cartilage that cushions the joints breaks down, often resulting in pain and deformity.

## RA is not just for the elderly

RA usually affects the middle-aged, but it often appears in people's 20s and 30s.



**“I definitely felt robbed of my youth when I was first diagnosed. I was so young, my peers didn't understand at all. And they were pretty harsh. It definitely changed my social circle.”**  
—Natalie, living with RA since 1986

## RA is chronic and progressive

Once RA appears, it can often get worse and may never completely go away.

## RA is not caused by injury

Though many people attribute the start of RA to one injury, the exact cause of RA is still unknown. What we do know is that RA affects everyone differently, which is why treating it can be difficult.



**“Everything just started to hurt and it kept getting worse and worse. My symptoms came on everywhere. I had aches all over. I couldn't even turn my head to try and back the car out of the driveway.”**  
—Linda, living with RA since 1997

For more RA information, visit [www.RISEsupport.com](http://www.RISEsupport.com) or call 1-877-474-8892.