

# **Rheumatoid Arthritis Symptoms, Causes, and Treatments**

**Judy Simcoe, PTA**  
**Physical Therapist Assistant**  
**Ham Lake Physical Therapy**

Rheumatoid arthritis is the most common form of inflammatory arthritis, and this disease may affect men and women of any age. It often first involves the hands, wrists, and feet, but over time may include ankles, knees, hips, elbows, shoulders, spine, and jaw. Some people with rheumatoid arthritis experience constant symptoms while others have “up and down” courses of “flare-ups” and good periods called remissions.

Regardless of the type of arthritis that a person has, many will experience some difficulty functioning at home, work, or at play due to joint pain, stiffness, and loss of motion. Often times, impairment of function is more distressing to patients than the pain of arthritis. The major goal of all arthritis treatment is the improvement of function. General principles for living with arthritis should be weight control, diet, and appropriate exercise, which is extremely important to decrease the stress on joints. Exercise such as range of motion and strengthening exercises are important to maintain and improve joint mobility and increase strength of the muscles around the joint to minimize stress. Aerobic exercises, such as walking or riding a stationary bike help to decrease fatigue and improve cardiovascular health. However, these exercises may be difficult for those who have pain in their hips, knees, and feet, and for these a water exercise program designed for comfortable movement by a physical therapist may be more tolerable for those individuals. Even though exercises are extremely beneficial to the successful treatment of arthritis, rest is also of importance as well. But, always remember to consult with your doctor before starting any kind of exercises.

There are many important considerations for “living with arthritis”, and successful treatment involves exercise, rest, and the maintenance of ideal body weight and a positive mental outlook and support of friends and family.