Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is also known as rheumatism. Inflammation causes pain, swelling and stiffness primarily in the joints, but it can also affect other organs.

Who gets it
The disease affects men and women, although women are more likely to get it. The disease can begin at any age, but it commonly appears after age 50. Certain groups who are exposed to asbestos, stone dust and asphalt have a greater risk of developing RA. Smoking is so far the best-documented environmental and lifestyle factor that significantly increases the risk of getting RA.

Symptoms
The early symptoms vary significantly. They usually appear gradually over a period of months or years. In unusual cases, RA appears suddenly over a period of a few days to a few weeks. Common to all forms of the beginning of the disease are joint pain and stiffness. A special blood test can confirm the diagnosis. RA is primarily a disease that affects the joints and surrounding structures. Inflammation develops, producing pain, stiffness, swelling and a sensation of warmth.

General malaise and extreme fatigue are other symptoms that are common both before the arthritis breaks out and further on in the disease process.

The small joints are often the first to be affected. Over time, more joints become affected, and this occurs symmetrically on both halves of the body.

After a lengthy period of illness, affected joints may stiffen and change shape. Abnormal positions occur, particularly in the hands.

Symptoms involving other organs in the body usually appear later in the illness. These may be:
- Inflammation in the pericardia and the pleura, the lungs, the eyes, the blood vessels (vasculitis), etc.
- Anaemia.

- Dry, irritated eyes due to reduced tear production. If dry eyes in conjunction with RA occur at the same time as dryness in the mucous membranes of the nose and the mouth, the condition is called secondary Sjögren’s syndrome.
- Effects on nerves – for example, carpal tunnel syndrome (pins and needles and numbness in the thumb, index finger and middle finger), reduced sensation and tingling in the legs.
- Risk of osteoporosis.

Treatment
The aim is to stop the inflammation process by means of an early diagnosis and early administration of disease-modifying drugs, and thus prevent tissue damage and functional impairment. The treatment is also

Did you know...

- Physical activity is important.
- Smoking increases the risk that the disease will flare up and worsen, and that the efficacy of the treatment will decline.
- Many people who have a genetic disposition to develop RA nevertheless do not develop the disease.
designed to reduce the pain and stiffness and maintain joint flexibility even in cases in which the disease has produced chronic changes and functional impairments. Physical activity to maintain and improve strength and general condition is an important component of the treatment.

Drugs are also used parallel to movement training. There are many types of anti-rheumatic medicines to retard the progression of the disease, inhibit inflammation and reduce pain and tenderness. In cases in which the disease has led to permanent joint damage involving severe joint misalignment and functional impairment, surgical treatment is an option.

### The Swedish Rheumatism Association

**A knowledge-based organisation**

Over a million people in Sweden have a rheumatic disease. The disease also affects those close to the sufferer. Our mission is to ensure that as many people as possible who are touched by rheumatic disease can lead a normal, meaningful life.

The Swedish Rheumatism Association is a knowledge organisation that strengthens the individual and consistently advocates for people suffering from rheumatic disease and other diseases in the organs of movement. We are a source of knowledge for our members, the public, politicians and the media. No other organisation has greater knowledge about what it’s like to live with rheumatic disease.

As a member, you receive six issues of our members’ magazine, Reumatikervärlden (in Swedish), widely recognized for its high quality. Our website contains a wealth of literature on diagnoses, research and current issues in our association. You can also interact with other members of the arthritis community through our members’ blog.

**Join the Swedish Rheumatism Association. We look forward to meeting you!**

Call 08-505 805 00, or register on our website, www.reumatikerforbundet.org

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### Arthritis Shop

”For people living with arthritis, by people living with arthritis”

To order information material (primarily in Swedish) or promotional items, visit the Arthritis Shop at www.reumashop.se, Tel. No. 073-7890556. Assistive devices can also be purchased there.

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**Support research through the Swedish Rheumatism Association**

Make your donation on the website of the Swedish Rheumatism Association, https://reumatikerforbundet.org/ or deposit it in Plusgiro Account No. 90 03 19-5, or Bankgiro Account No. 900-3195

Thank you!