Living with rheumatoid arthritis can mean living with chronic pain, fatigue, and joint stiffness. Thousands of people have benefited from developing and following plans to help them manage their symptoms. You and your doctor can create a medical treatment plan that may include medicine and other therapies. Early medical treatment can help you avoid disabling joint changes and chronic pain.

Besides following your medical treatment plan, there are several steps you can take to maintain your normal life and activities. This is often called self-management. The first steps include:

- Learning as much as you can about rheumatoid arthritis.
- Learning ways to reduce joint pain, fatigue, and stiffness.
- Taking an active role in managing your rheumatoid arthritis.

How do you manage your rheumatoid arthritis?

Understand your arthritis

- Learn about your body and what is happening to it with rheumatoid arthritis.
- Learn about your doctors, the recommended medicines, and what they can do for you.
- Find out what can improve your health, such as losing weight or starting a flexibility exercise program.

Learn how to cope with chronic pain, fatigue, and stiffness

- Experiment and learn what can help you feel better and what makes things worse. Some
people can write without pain while others can't, and the same goes for walking and aerobics and other physical tasks or activities.

- Learn basic skills, such as ways to use your body that protect stiff areas, that will help you continue activities.
- Explore the use of splints, canes, and other assistive devices that can help you avoid discomfort while staying active.

**Take an active role in managing your arthritis**

- Gather information about rheumatoid arthritis and the steps you can take to stay active.
- Work with your team of doctors, friends, and family to set up a self-management plan.
- Set goals to practice your coping and strengthening skills and incorporate these goals into your life.
- Follow through with your self-management plan on a day-to-day basis.

**Credits for Arthritis: Managing Rheumatoid Arthritis**

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