

## Focus on Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease where the body attacks itself, causing chronic joint inflammation. While it primarily affects joints, it can also cause inflammation of organs as the disease gets worse. People with RA may experience an increase in symptoms – called flares – that can last for days or weeks. They may also have periods of remission where they have few or no symptoms. There is no cure for rheumatoid arthritis, but medications can slow the progression of the disease and ease symptoms.

### The signs and symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis

- Tender, warm, swollen joints
- Joint stiffness that is usually worse in the mornings and after inactivity
- Fatigue, fever and weight loss

Early rheumatoid arthritis tends to affect your smaller joints first - particularly the joints that attach your fingers to your hands and your toes to your feet.

As the disease progresses, symptoms often spread to the wrists, knees, ankles, elbows, hips and shoulders. In most cases, symptoms occur in the same joints on both sides of your body.

About 40% of people who have rheumatoid arthritis also experience signs and symptoms that don't involve the joints. Rheumatoid arthritis can affect many non-joint structures, including:

- Skin
- Eyes
- Lungs
- Heart
- Kidneys
- Salivary glands
- Nerve tissue
- Bone marrow
- Blood vessels

Rheumatoid arthritis signs and symptoms may vary in severity and may even come and go. Periods of increased disease activity, called flares, alternate with periods of relative remission — when the swelling and pain fade or disappear. Over time, rheumatoid arthritis can cause joints to deform and shift out of place.



### **Possible causes of rheumatoid arthritis**

Rheumatoid arthritis occurs when your immune system attacks the synovium — the lining of the membranes that surround your joints. The resulting inflammation thickens the synovium, which can eventually destroy the cartilage and bone within the joint.

The tendons and ligaments that hold the joint together weaken and stretch. Gradually, the joint loses its shape and alignment. Doctors don't know what starts this process, although a genetic component appears likely. While your genes don't actually cause rheumatoid arthritis, they can make you more susceptible to environmental factors — such as infection with certain viruses and bacteria — that may trigger the disease.

### **Risk factors**

Factors that may increase your risk of rheumatoid arthritis include:

- Your gender. Women are more likely than men to develop rheumatoid arthritis.
- Age. Rheumatoid arthritis can occur at any age, but it most commonly begins between the ages of 40 and 60.
- Family history. If a member of your family has rheumatoid arthritis, you may have an increased risk of the disease.
- Smoking. Cigarette smoking increases your risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis, particularly if you have a genetic predisposition for developing the disease. Smoking also appears to be associated with greater disease severity.
- Environmental exposures. Although uncertain and poorly understood, some exposures such as asbestos or silica may increase the risk for developing rheumatoid arthritis. Emergency workers exposed to dust from the collapse of the World Trade Centre are at higher risk of autoimmune diseases such as rheumatoid arthritis.
- Obesity. People who are overweight or obese appear to be at somewhat higher risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis, especially in women diagnosed with the disease when they were 55 or younger.

### **How to register on the chronic programme**

Once you have been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis, please ask your doctor to contact our Chronic Medicine Department on **0860 11 78 59** to register you on the Chronic Medicine Management Programme.

The chronic medicine consultant will liaise with your doctor regarding your treatment. Once the diagnostic criteria have been met and blood results have been submitted, the treatment will be approved.

We will let you know whether the treatment falls within the Momentum Medical Scheme formulary (the list of approved medications) or if you will need to pay a co-payment.



Once you receive authorisation, you can take your prescription to your designated service provider to get your medication, and the claim can be submitted. A designated service provider (DSP) is a healthcare provider (doctor, pharmacist, hospital, etc.) that is a medical scheme's first choice when its members require diagnosis, treatment or care for a Prescribed Minimum Benefit condition. If you voluntarily choose not to use the DSP and choose to rather use a different hospital, doctor or pharmacy, we may charge a co-payment.

The authorisation usually expires after 12 months. If there is no change in the medicine you need to take, your doctor or pharmacist can contact us on **0860 11 78 59** to renew the authorisation. The same process applies when there are any changes or additions to your authorisation.

### **Hospitalisation**

If you need to be hospitalised for rheumatoid arthritis complications, please call us on **0860 11 78 59** to request pre-authorisation. We will allocate a case manager to follow up regarding your hospital stay.

### **Treatment plan**

Once you are registered on the programme, you will have access to a treatment plan, which may include cover for tests or doctor's visits or other benefits considered medically necessary by your doctor – these will be reviewed by our clinical team to ensure appropriateness.

### **Please make sure your claims have the appropriate ICD-10 code**

It is important for all claims to include the appropriate ICD-10 codes (diagnostic codes), so we can identify the claim correctly and pay it from the Chronic Benefit.

### **We may pay claims from your Day-to-day Benefits if:**

- The claims are submitted without the relevant ICD-10 codes.
- You have exceeded the frequency limit on consultations or tests.
- The treatment is not clinically appropriate.

For more on your chronic benefits and where to obtain chronic medicine and treatment, [click here](#).

### **Contact us**

You can call us on 0860 11 78 59 or visit [momentummedicalscheme.co.za](https://momentummedicalscheme.co.za) for more information.

### Glossary of terms

**ICD-10** is a system of coding that notes various medical records including diseases, symptoms, abnormal findings and external causes of injury. It is your diagnosis code.

**Prescribed Minimum Benefits** is a list of benefits for which all medical schemes in South Africa have to provide cover in terms of the Medical Schemes Act 131 of 1998 and the Regulations thereto. In order to access these benefits:

- Your medical condition must qualify for cover and be part of the defined list of Prescribed Minimum Benefit conditions.
- The treatment needed must match the treatments in the defined benefits.
- You must use the Scheme's Designated Service Providers. See the definition of Designated Service Providers on page 2 for more information.

If you voluntarily choose to use non-designated service providers, the Scheme will pay benefits up to the Momentum Medical Scheme Rate and relevant co-payments will apply. If you use non-designated service providers in cases of an emergency medical condition, it is deemed involuntary and co-payments are therefore waived.

If your medical condition and treatment do not meet the above criteria to access these benefits, we will pay according to the benefits on your chosen benefit option.

A **formulary** is a list of medicines covered on your option, from which a doctor can prescribe the appropriate medication for your chronic condition.