How RA Affects Longevity and What You Can Do About It

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Mortality Risks

Rheumatoid arthritis can considerably shorten a patient's life span – up to 12 years in some cases – depending on the severity of the disease and how it affects the rest of the body. Luckily, research has uncovered some helpful markers and promising approaches that can increase your chances for a better treatment plan and a longer life. Let's take a look at some of the mortality risks for rheumatoid arthritis.

Assessing Your Risk of Early Death

Not every RA patient is at high risk for early mortality. Sometimes the outlook depends on genetic issues, in other cases, it rests on complications that could be avoided. Factors that can influence longevity include:

- How old you are when RA strikes. Patients who are diagnosed at a young age may have shorter life spans than those who contract the disease later in life.
- The severity of your rheumatoid arthritis, especially when it begins to affect organs or necessitates hospitalization.
- Age and gender. Studies have shown that aging male sufferers are at a greater risk of earlier death than younger males or females.
- Whether or not you experience other major health problems. Life-threatening complications can occur in patients who suffer from (and treat) multiple medical conditions simultaneously.

Cardiovascular and respiratory problems account for the highest proportion of early deaths among RA patients. Severe inflammation can lead to atherosclerosis, or hardening of the arteries in the heart and lungs, which can cause fatal heart attack and stroke. RA patients with limited function and poor general health will be more prone to these systemic diseases.

How to Decrease Your Mortality Risk

When you struggle with rheumatoid arthritis, a healthy routine and a personalized treatment plan are crucial for comfort and health. Early and effective medical treatment will be your best bet for longer life: targeted medication will slow the rate of joint deterioration and hazardous inflammation that can lead to fatal complications.

Although some drugs simply treat symptoms, others have a broader range of benefits. DMARDs are often the first course of action in any RA treatment plan, and along with slowing disease progression, these drugs can reduce inflammation in the arteries that feed the heart. Since many cases of early death are traced to heart disease, an early course of aggressive DMARD therapy can keep your cardiovascular system healthy and strong.

Along with a healthy heart, you need a strong respiratory system to ward off infection. Pulmonary infection is responsible for many severe complications, so it's vital that you get a flu shot each year and a pneumonia vaccination every 5 years to prevent these serious respiratory threats.

Once you have taken all the important preventative measures, you'll need regular and thorough check-ups to make sure everything stays on track. Your doctor will need to monitor your blood pressure, cholesterol levels, renal function and other predictors of disease activity, and you must report any new symptoms without delay. Although some mortality factors are outside your control, attentive clinical care will ward off many potentially fatal complications.