How to Reduce Your Risk of Infection With RA

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Rheumatoid Arthritis Infection Risks

Infections are a fact of life, however when you suffer from rheumatoid arthritis (RA) or any other autoimmune disease, it can wreak some serious havoc in your life.

With a compromised immune system already, many patients with RA are also on heavy immunosuppressant drugs that can also promote infections. The best way to ensure infections don't cause long-term damage is to ensure they don't happen in the first place.

Although it isn't always easy, and by no means fool proof, there are several ways you can take control.

Speaking to Your Doctor

If you find you often have a viral infection, especially if you're on immunosuppressant drugs, speak to your doctor as soon as possible. Finding out the right dosage of these drugs can be a balancing act; too little and your RA may flare, and too much may suppress your immune system too far and leave you prone to infection.

This is especially true when you're on a long-term dose. Ensure you speak with your doctor to work to find what works best.

Wash Your Hands

Although it may seem like a no-brainer, it is incredibly important to keep your hands clean, especially if you are on high doses of immunosuppressant drugs or chemotherapy for your RA.

Always wash your hands thoroughly with warm water after using the bathroom, caring for wounds or any other internal device like a port or catheter, before and after you eat, after coughing or sneezing and after touching another person. These are all important ways to ensure you keep any infection at bay.

Alert Your Doctor to Changes

If you think you've developed an infection, let your doctor know as soon as possible. This way, they can help you begin the best course of treatment to ensure the infection is completely flushed out of your system.

If you have a fever and are on chemotherapy or immunosuppressant drugs, it is important to seek medical attention immediately. Otherwise, be conscious of other signs and symptoms your doctor needs to be aware of.

These symptoms can include, but are not limited to, a sore throat, skin rashes, stiff neck, pain or burning upon urination, vomiting, diarrhea, swelling and redness around wounds, and chills and sweats.

While this list contains symptoms your doctor should be made aware of, they are by no means exhaustive. If you feel as though you need medical attention, it is better to be safe than sorry.

Stay Away From Places Where Infection May Be Prevalent

While treating an active bout of RA, it is important to stay away from places where infections may be rife. This includes staying away from crowded areas, restricting air travel, and staying away from populations of people prone to infection.

This may mean that if you have a relative in the hospital, it is best to avoid visiting until your flare or course of treatment has ended. Similarly, it would be prudent to avoid visiting a nursing home, preschool or day care during this time, as those under six and in advanced age are more prone to carrying infections and diseases that may transfer to you.

If you must go to a crowded area, nursing facility, or school with young children, consider wearing a surgical mask when you do. Carry antibacterial soap with you and use it frequently to avoid germs passing along to you.

Practicing Good Food Hygiene

Practicing good food hygiene is also important to staving off infections in RA patients. This means you should always wash any fruits or vegetables thoroughly before consuming, even if the package says they have previously been washed.

Additionally, it is important you ensure all of your meat is cooked so there are no raw contaminants, and that you do not consume raw eggs or milk that has not been pasteurized.

Avoid Sharing Food and Personal Items

If you live with others, it is wise to avoid sharing things like combs, wash cloths, toothbrushes and dining utensils. Instead, make sure you use items that are only yours.

Additionally, do not share drinks with others or eat food after someone else. These two activities can drastically up your risk of infection, so it’s important you refrain from them.

Get Vaccinated

Speak to your doctor about vaccines and ensure you are up to date with yours. Vaccinating yourself from the flu and other diseases can ensure you stay healthy during your treatment.

Wear Bug Spray and Ensure Your Animals are Clean

Infections can also spread through insects, such as ticks and mosquitos. If you go outside often, ensure you wear bug spray during your course of treatment to keep any pesky insects at bay.

If you own animals, be sure they are regularly treated for fleas and ticks so they do not bring anything that could compromise your immune system into the home.

Have Safe Sex

If you are sexually active, it is important that you or your partner wear a condom. This will prevent infections they may have from spreading to you and thus causing further issues.

Be Careful Around Animals

If you have cats, it is safe to say you'll be off litter box duty for a while, as cleaning up cat feces can actually cause infection in humans. Likewise, it is important that all of your domestic animals are up to date on their shots and vaccines so they do not bring any illnesses into your home.

You should also avoid touching or being in close proximity with any wild animals, or other dogs when you are out walking your own. Be cautious around pets of friends and relatives and ensure their animals are up to date on their vaccines before playing with them.

When you have finished touching any animals, wash your hands thoroughly and completely to avoid infections.