10 Ways to Prevent and Treat Rheumatoid Arthritis Flares

by ELIZABETH MCSPIRITT

RA Flares

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic inflammatory disease that affects the joints. It is a lifelong disease, with periods of remission and RA flares. Helping you understand what a flare is and how you can both prevent and treat them are key to limiting the effects of this disease.

How to Prevent RA Flares

There are currently no medications available that can completely prevent flares from happening, but there are things you can do to take control of your disease and prevent flares from getting worse. By taking the right steps, you can keep doing the things you love while staying healthy in the future.

1. Keep a Journal

An important element in preventing flares is to know the signs of an oncoming flare. Keeping a journal to record what the early signs of a flare are, what symptoms you experience and how long the flare lasts will help you better manage your disease in the future.

2. Manage Your Stress

Psychological stress can be a trigger for RA flares. An increase in everyday stress can lead to an exacerbation of your disease. Stress management can include meditation, yoga and seeing a therapist. There is also an increased risk of flares in rheumatoid arthritis patients with depression and anxiety.

3. Get Your Rest

Trouble sleeping has been shown to increase the number of flares and how painful a flare is. Sleep problems in RA can include both having trouble falling asleep and waking up often during the night, which all lead to chronic fatigue. Having a flare can also cause problems with sleeping, leading to a vicious cycle of flares and lack of sleep.

4. Get Immunized

Getting immunized for the flu and pneumonia can prevent you from getting sick, and it can prevent you from getting an infection (both can act as triggers for RA flares).

5. Avoid Pollutants and Other Triggers

Air pollution has been shown to trigger RA flares, and people living in urban areas have a greater chance of being diagnosed with RA. Food sensitivities have also been found to be associated with RA flares. Keeping a food diary

and avoiding triggers can also help to prevent worsening symptoms.

6. Stop Smoking

Smoking not only increases your chances of getting RA, but it can also make your symptoms worse. Smoking has been identified as one of the biggest environmental risk factors for RA.

7. Take Your Medication

Continue with disease-modifying drugs and the possible addition of steroids, NSAIDs or acetaminophen to help manage inflammation and pain of a flare. Remain adherent to your prescribed disease-modifying drugs, as how adherent patients are with their medications is associated with the risk of disease flares.

How to Treat RA Flares

Despite your best efforts, flares can still happen. The goal of treatment is to decrease inflammation and prevent joint damage. When you do have a flare, home remedies can help to lessen your symptoms. These can include the use of hot or cold packs to decrease your pain, stiffness and swelling.

8. Exercise

Gentle exercise can help reduce the pain and stiffness that accompanies an RA flare. During a flare, even something as straightforward as range-of-motion exercises can help to keep mobility and alleviate pain.

9. Diet

Eating a healthy diet, including one that has inflammation-fighting foods in it, has been shown to make RA symptoms better in nearly 25% of patients. Foods that have been shown to decrease inflammation include fruits and vegetables, fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids and whole grains.

10. Herbal Supplements

Herbal supplements can help prevent flares of RA. These include curcumin, ginger, omega-3 with EPA or DHA, capsaicin and gamma linolenic acid. Vitamin D may also be effective in treating flares.

In Conclusion

While these 10 options can be gentle and effective at treating and preventing flare-ups, it is good to talk to your doctor before deciding which to use. They can offer guidance on which will be the most effective, such as switching up your diet vs. changing up a medication. After all, every case is different. Meditation may help one patient but not others. Also, if you have applied these tips and you still aren't finding relief, then tell your doctor this. They will know what the next steps forward should be so you can have improved pain levels.