5 Ways Rheumatoid Arthritis Can Affect Quality of Life

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Rheumatoid Arthritis Life Expectancy

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) may lower one's lifespan, but medical advancements have helped people live longer than ever before. In this article, we will talk about rheumatoid arthritis life expectancy and how you can preserve your quality of life despite symptoms.

Various lifestyle changes can increase rheumatoid arthritis life expectancy. However, how long a person lives and in what ways their quality of life is affected all center around a few key factors.

Taking a Closer Look at Life Expectancy

The invention of new medications, namely biologics, has been shown to slow disease progression and decrease dangerously high inflammatory markers within the body. This has been life-changing for many with RA and has even saved lives. On average, RA is known to cut life expectancy by about 10 years. This number is in comparison to people who are not diagnosed with the disease.

Rheumatoid arthritis does not directly cause of decreased lifespan, but the serious complications that can occur from the disease have an effect. Chronic inflammation present in the body does not only attack the lining of the joints, but it puts stress on various organs, such as the heart and lungs. But routine blood tests and physicals can track disease activity. This essentially tells your doctor how well-controlled your RA is.

The goal with disease activity is to always aim for it to be the lowest it can be — preferably nonexistent, which would indicate remission. Changing lifestyle habits and taking medication prescribed by a rheumatologist can yield positive results. Some of these daily habits to start incorporating are exercise, quitting smoking, reducing stress, eating a well-rounded diet and getting enough sleep.

The Role Complications Play

Rheumatoid arthritis can affect the eyes, heart and lungs. Cardiovascular disease has caused most complications and deaths. The key factor is the chronic inflammation associated with RA.
Therefore, it is important to keep up with routine physicals with a primary care doctor and rheumatologist. This is the only way to keep tabs on disease progression.

Smoking, having high cholesterol, blood pressure and emotional stress can all impact heart health. Inflammation in the body can be managed and other preventative tests can keep things in check. But if other lifestyle factors do not change or go unchecked, it will create a vicious cycle, increasing inflammation over time. Researchers have found that people with rheumatoid arthritis are twice more likely to experience heart attacks, strokes and atherosclerosis caused by cholesterol.

In addition to heart complications, lung and digestive diseases and diabetes, cancer, such as lymphoma, may

occur. Some causes for complications are inflammation, genetics, environmental exposure, infections and medication side effects.

Rheumatoid nodules and having a high rheumatoid factor found in antibody blood tests are two other factors that can indicate a shortened lifespan.

How Rheumatoid Arthritis Affects Quality of Life

Rheumatoid arthritis impacts someone on a physical level, but other areas of concern are mental health, financial, social and faith.

1. Physically

Physically, people may experience loss of function and mobility due to joint damage. Working with a physical therapist, occupational therapist or personal trainer can help. Other times, surgeries in the form of joint replacements may be needed to improve quality of life.

2. Mentally and Emotionally

Those with rheumatoid arthritis are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety. Seeking a therapist can help a person deal with loss, grief, anger, denial and other emotions that may arise during a diagnosis or months and years later.

3. Socially

The disease can make it hard to go out and enjoy life. This may cause strain in all kinds of relationships and stop someone from attending social events. Fatigue, joint pain, inflammation, flares and lack of mobility are just a few reasons a person living with RA may not be a social butterfly at any given moment. That’s why having a strong support network, or a community that understands the unpredictability of the disease is crucial.

4. Accessibility

How accessible things are to people living with RA, plays a role within the environment. If a person cannot get around easily, that is a big factor in their quality of life. This holds true for those with rheumatoid arthritis who need to use mobility aids, such as a cane, walker, or wheelchair.

5. Medically

Medications used to treat rheumatoid arthritis can have side effects that range from fatigue, anxiety, depression and sexual dysfunction, all of which affect every aspect of life.

Ways to Maintain a Good Quality of Life and Increase Life Expectancy

What quality of life means to one person, may not be the same definition for another.

On some days, rheumatoid arthritis can make it difficult to complete even the simplest of tasks. For others, it is like this most days. Working with your rheumatologist and other members of your care team to make the best treatment plan possible is the first way to maintain a good quality of life.

You can live better with rheumatoid arthritis, even if some things need to be modified. Using adaptive equipment, engaging in social activities that are accessible, trying a hobby you find enjoyable, being around a good support system and seeking the counsel of a therapist are all important ways to help you thrive and live life, despite rheumatoid arthritis.