The Physical and Emotional Symptoms of RA in Young Adults

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Rheumatoid Arthritis in Young Adults

Arthritis is often considered a disease of the elderly, but that can be misleading. While rheumatoid arthritis is typically diagnosed between the ages of 30 and 80, some people begin to experience symptoms much earlier, and they will find it remarkably difficult to adapt to condition.

The sudden onset of inflammation, soreness and fatigue that characterize RA will almost certainly interfere with school, work, career transitions and family planning – all of the important elements that are used to build a successful, independent life. In many cases, a comprehensive support network will help, and that begins with a better understanding of how RA affects younger people.

Dealing with the Diagnosis

An RA diagnosis calls for lifestyle changes that can be a lot to bear for those who are already dealing with major physical, emotional and psychological transitions. Younger RA patients may face some particularly distressing realities, such as:

- **Greater chance of sustaining permanent damage.** When RA hits early in life, it will need to be controlled for many years. Since it is a progressive disease (that is, symptoms worsen with time), an early onset means there's more time for the disease to cause long-term damage. There will be more pressure on doctors and patients to find an effective and sustainable treatment plan right away.
- **Side effects can be devastating.** Anti-rheumatic drugs are important, but they can bring a host of unwelcome effects, from liver damage to weight gain to lower immunity to disease. When organs and tissues are still growing and developing, small issues can become bigger concerns. Medication will need to be chosen carefully.
- **Lifestyle changes can affect self-esteem.** When you suddenly lose the ability to play a sport, continue with regular social events, or even stay reasonably active, you may begin to suffer emotionally. This can be one of the biggest challenges from rheumatoid arthritis in young adults, since physical expectations are high, and social interaction plays a particularly important role in growth and development.

Unfortunately, some of the hardship for patients comes from a general misunderstanding of the disease. In many cases, people assume that if you look alright, you must feel alright, while failing to understand how much pain a person is feeling unless they have bandages or braces to prove it. The stigma of RA is also a tough obstacle to overcome, and it can be tedious to live with, day in and day out.

Family Planning with RA

Rheumatoid arthritis affects three times as many women as men, and many of those young women have pressing concerns about motherhood. Although it is true that family planning can be much more difficult when you live with a chronic disease, extra preparation and careful research can help you have a healthy pregnancy, and pave the

way to a fulfilling family life.

Half of patients with RA go into remission during pregnancy, while the other half will experience a flare. Unfortunately, it’s impossible to predict how your body will react, so look into appropriate medications and possible ways to adjust your treatment plan ahead of time. It can feel like life is spiralling out of control when symptoms act up, and although you will have the urge to resist or react against the effects of RA, try to stay flexible with your plans and adjust your expectations of yourself. When you learn to take challenges in stride, you are better able to stay optimistic and proactive.