Enjoy Being a Teen Despite an RA Diagnosis

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Managing RA in Teens

Adolescence is a most wonderful and exciting time, when a person undergoes changes on physical, emotional and social levels. But suffering from rheumatoid arthritis can have an impact on all these changes. While RA appears more often in older adults, RA in teens and young adults can happen. Here are some tips that can help you better enjoy this part of your life with arthritis.

Changes

Whether you've been diagnosed with arthritis or not, you will go through the following stages during adolescence:

- You'll gain a better understanding of who you are and develop your personal and sexual identity.
- You'll become independent from your parents and start taking on more responsibility (especially in relation to your health, education and money).
- You'll develop closer relationships outside of your family, ie a girlfriend or boyfriend and other friends your age.
- You'll plan your future, which may involve college or university, or finding a job.

Thinking About Your Future

When thinking about what you want your future to look like, be aware of the limitations your RA causes, but don't let them stop you from pursuing your dreams. Think about what you would really love to do, and look for a career that is fulfilling, provides financial support and allows you to express your best qualities. Talk to your teacher and parents and get their opinions as well. If arthritis limits your ability to stand on your feet for long hours, or drive extensively, you will have to narrow your career choices. Regardless of the field you choose, remember to prepare for the real word. Be realistic about your limitations, but at the same time try to stay as independent as possible.

Developing Relationships

You will likely feel different from others your age because you have arthritis. and this may cause you to want to spend time alone, rather than going out and socializing. Sometimes pain or doctors appointments will keep you away from school. All of this is difficult, but don't get discouraged. Rather, try to keep your mind and body healthy. Practice yoga or other relaxation techniques to keep your stress away. Keep a diary and make lists of the things and people that make you feel happy – writing down your thoughts can help you better understand your emotions. Find good friends that you can talk to and are supportive. Listen to music and pursue your hobbies.

Sex

During adolescence you become more aware and develop your sexual identity. You may be concerned that joint pain may not allow you to have pleasurable sex experiences. The best way to start your sexual life is to find a partner you can talk to, someone who will listen and who understands that you may have some limitations. A sex educator can provide advice about comfortable positions during sex. While everyone should practice safe sex, if you are a young woman on methotrexate, contraception is crucial as this drug can harm a baby. If you plan to have babies in the future, keep in mind you should talk to your specialist to review the drugs you are taking.

Who Can I Talk To?

Help is available, don’t hesitate to ask! Many healthcare professionals can provide advice (which is confidential) - from school or college nurses, to doctors, teachers, social workers, vocational counselors (for your career choices), psychologists and more.