

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is a symmetric inflammatory disease. It is common affecting 1 - 2% of the adult population. Although RA can occur at any age, it is usually diagnosed in the third to fifth decades and affects women twice as often as men.

Typical symptoms and findings include:

- Morning stiffness
- Arthritis in multiple joints
- Symmetric arthritis (i.e. both hands)
- Rheumatoid nodules (subcutaneous nodules located under the skin)
- Involvement of joints in the hands or wrists
- Positive rheumatoid factor (blood test)
- Typical x-ray findings

RA is a systemic disease that can affect many other organs besides the joints, such as the heart and lungs. Other systemic effects include: weight loss, fever, and low blood counts.

A significant proportion of RA patients are disabled to some degree within 5 years of diagnosis, and many stop working by 10 years. Excess mortality in RA is due to infection, GI bleeding, other organ involvement, and cardiovascular disease. RA is treated with a variety of medications, many of which can have significant side effects. Common agents used include: aspirin, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory agents (NSAID), hydrochloroquine, prednisone, sulfasalazine, leflunomide, minocycline, and methotrexate. Biological disease modifying anti-rheumatic agents (DMARDS) are effective, but have toxicity and a risk of cancer and infection. The rating for RA will depend upon the severity of disease. Mild RA (normal laboratory and Xray results, no functional disability or other organ involvement) that is treated with simple medication regimens (NSAIDs, aspirin, sulfasalazine, hydroxychloroquine, minocycline) will be non-rated. Moderate disease would be rated Table B to D range. Disease that has been inactive for at least 2-5yr will be considered for lower ratings. Severe disease (severe functional disability, wheelchair bound, or RA disease in organs besides the joints) will generally be declined.

If your client has a history of Rheumatoid Arthritis, please answer the following:

1. Please list date of first diagnosis

2. Is your client on any medications?

Yes, please give details

3. Please check if your client has had any of the following:

Weight loss Lung disease ____
Fever Liver enzyme abnormality ____
Low blood counts Kidney disease ____
Heart disease ____

4. Which joints are involved?

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5. Please check functional ability:

fully active ____
sedentary ____
uses walker, cane, etc. ____
uses wheelchair ____

6. Has your client smoked cigarettes or any other tobacco products in the last 5 years?

Yes, please give details

7. Does your client have any other major health problems (ex: cancer, etc.)?

Yes, please give details
