

Consumer health: Smoking and rheumatoid arthritis—what's the connection?

May 20 2021, by From Mayo Clinic News Network



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May is Arthritis Awareness Month, which makes this a good time to learn more about the connection between smoking and rheumatoid arthritis.

Rheumatoid [arthritis](#) is a chronic inflammatory disorder that can affect more than just your joints. In some people, the condition can damage a wide variety of body systems, including the skin, eyes, lungs, heart and [blood vessels](#).

Signs and symptoms of [rheumatoid arthritis](#) may include tender, warm, swollen joints; joint stiffness that is usually worse in the mornings and after inactivity; fatigue; fever; and loss of appetite. About 40% of people who have rheumatoid arthritis also experience signs and symptoms that don't involve the joints.

Smoking is linked to the development of rheumatoid arthritis, particularly for people who have smoked 20 years or longer. Smokers with rheumatoid arthritis have an increased risk of greater disease severity and may be less likely to experience remission. Smoking also decreases the effectiveness of some drugs used to treat rheumatoid arthritis.

Quitting smoking is one of the best things that you can do for your health. Along with increasing your risk of developing rheumatoid arthritis risks, smoking increases your risk of developing lung and other cancers; [cardiovascular disease](#) and stroke; and diabetes.

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Citation: Consumer health: Smoking and rheumatoid arthritis—what's the connection? (2021, May 20) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-05-consumer-health-rheumatoid-arthritiswhat.html>

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