

Study reveals enormous advances for rheumatoid arthritis patients

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People living with Rheumatoid Arthritis have experienced significant improvements in their daily lives which is probably down to early and more aggressive treatment of the disease, according to new research from The Universities of Manchester and East Anglia.

James Gwinnutt, first author of this study from The University of Manchester, conducted the Arthritis Research UK study, led by Dr Suzan Verstappen University of Manchester, into the devastating disease which examined 20 years of data from 1990 to 2010.

The 602 [patients](#) in this study, Published in *Arthritis and Rheumatology*, were recruited to the Norfolk Arthritis Register (NOAR: Chief Investigator Professor Alex MacGregor University of East Anglia) and assessed at regular intervals over the course of 20 years.

The team found that patients who were prescribed disease modifying [drug therapies](#) such as sulfasalazine, methotrexate and steroids within 6

months of symptom onset experienced significantly better ability to walk, grip and dress themselves over the course of 20 years compared, to patients who were treated later.

And patients who received these disease modifying drug therapies within the first 6 months had a lower risk of dying, after controlling for the severity of the disease.

Mr Gwinnutt said: "This research shows that patients who received treatment early after [symptom onset](#) had similar levels of disability over the subsequent 20 years compared to patients who were judged by clinicians not to require treatment, after accounting for the differences in disease severity between the groups.

"Though there is a broad range in terms of how people are affected by the disease, the number of patients whose lives have improved has increased thanks in part to early treatment."

He added: "The good news is that early intervention has become more and more common in the NHS over these past 20 years.

"In the early 1990s [early intervention](#) would happen in about 30% of cases. Nowadays, that figure is probably more like 60-70%.

"There's no reason why this improvement could not extend further."

Dr Natalie Carter, head of research liaison and evaluation at Arthritis Research UK, comments;

"Rheumatoid [arthritis](#) is an incredibly painful condition that can be diagnosed at any age and can have an impact on a person's everyday life. This study confirms how important early diagnosis and the commencement of treatment is. It is also encouraging to hear about the progress that has been made over the last 20 years.

Now the scientific community must continue to build on this so that together we can continue to harness the power of exceptional science and make [everyday life](#) better for all people with arthritis."

Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune [disease](#) that causes joint inflammation and pain.

It is the second most common form of arthritis in the UK and around 1% of the adult population suffer from it.

There have been major advances in available treatments and strategies for the management of RA over the past 20 years.

Provided by University of Manchester

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