

Plain
Talk
About
Arthritis
and
Key
Words



Arthritis

Brigham and Women's Hospital
Arthritis and Musculoskeletal
Clinical Research Center

Health and Literacy Studies
Harvard School of Public Health

National Center for the Study of
Adult Learning and Literacy

This booklet was made possible
by an educational grant from:

Rheuminations, Inc.

Plain Talk About Arthritis and Key Words

Rima E. Rudd, ScD

Emily K. Zobel, ScM

Victoria Gall, PT, MEd

Simha Ravven, AB

Lawren H. Daltroy, DrPH (1948–2003)

This booklet was written so that we can begin to use the same words when we talk about arthritis. Please share it with friends.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Lynn Rasmussen, EdM, MSc
Jennie B. Epstein, BA

REVIEWERS:

Nancy Shadick, MD, MPH
Eliazabeth Benito-Garcia, MD, MPH
Victoria Purcell-Gates, EdD

DESIGNER:

Suzi Wojdyslawski

LAYOUT and PRINTING:

Puritan Press, Inc.

Table of Contents

Plain Talk About Arthritis	1
Common Questions	2
Take Care and Take Action	3
Arthritis Words from A to Z	13
Key Words	15
Abbreviations	39
Common Tests	41
Places to Go for Care or Testing	43
Words to Ask About	45
Place to Call For More Information	46

Plain Talk About Arthritis

Plain Talk About Arthritis gives the everyday meaning of some medical words that are used when talking about arthritis. Many of the words and phrases used by medical people are special to their work and may feel like another language to us. We hope this booklet will help you when you read or talk to people about arthritis.

What will you find in this booklet?

First we talk about arthritis.

Next, we list words from A to Z. These words are often found in patient booklets and handouts. We give the meaning of each word and try to use plain English. We also give a sentence for each word.

Finally, at the end of this booklet, we leave space for new words, phrases and places you can call for more information.

Common Questions

If you have arthritis, you probably have many questions.

How will I look and feel?

You will look and feel well most of the time. The people you live with and work with may have trouble understanding that you have a disease. Many people do not understand that some diseases are quiet for awhile and then can flare up for awhile.

How long will this last?

Arthritis is a chronic disease. A chronic disease is with you always. It cannot be cured. BUT . . . chronic diseases can be managed.

Arthritis is not a simple disease. You can not take a pill and make it go away. Arthritis can be a bit different for every person who has it.

Can anything be done?

The good news is that you can get help to treat and to manage your arthritis. There are many types of treatments. Medicine is just one of them. Your doctor may have to try a few medicines before finding the one which works for you.

Take Care and Take Action

Experts talk about four basic care and action steps.

- **Get the facts.**
You need to know about arthritis in order to take care of yourself.
- **Have a medical check-up on a regular basis.**
This type of disease changes over time and with life events. You can take better care when you note and act on changes.
- **Get support to help you with the emotional side of illness.**
Illness can be hard on our minds and on our emotions. Managing a disease is hard work and we need to be sure that we have the support we need.
- **Move more and eat better.**
You will feel better if you are active and eat healthy foods. This helps you build the strength and energy your body needs to deal with arthritis.

Get the facts about arthritis and about arthritis care

The word “arthritis” comes from the Greek words: “arth” and “itis.” “Arth” means joint and “itis” means inflammation. There are many kinds of arthritis with many causes. Arthritis can be caused by inflammation, injury, or infection. Inflammation can cause swelling, pain and stiffness. Sometimes an inflamed joint can feel hot or look red.

Some kinds of arthritis are:

Rheumatoid arthritis is also known as RA. RA causes inflammation in many joints. The most common symptoms of RA are pain, stiffness and swelling of the joints. These symptoms can come and go. When the symptoms come back it is called a flare.

Psoriatic arthritis is arthritis with psoriasis. Psoriasis causes scaly dry patches to form on the skin. Arthritis causes pain and swelling in many joints. These symptoms come and go. When the symptoms come back it is called a flare.

Juvenile arthritis is any kind of arthritis that begins before age 18. There are many forms of childhood arthritis. One form is called Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis (JRA). The childhood forms are a little different from the adult forms.

Osteoarthritis is also known as OA, degenerative arthritis or degenerative joint disease. OA causes cartilage to breakdown. It is the most common kind of arthritis. It can be caused by aging, injury, being overweight, overusing a joint or from a poorly formed joint that you were born with. The most common symptoms of OA are stiffness and pain. These symptoms most often are in the hips, knees, back, neck and finger joints.

Who is affected by arthritis?

Anyone can get arthritis, even children. It affects all races and all ethnic groups.

Rheumatoid arthritis is more common in women than men. About 2.1 million Americans have RA. It usually begins in the young or middle adult years.

Psoriatic arthritis affects men and women. It usually begins between the age of 30 and 55. About 10% of people who have psoriasis will get psoriatic arthritis.

Osteoarthritis is more common in women than men. About 20.7 million Americans older than 45 will have this form of arthritis.

Juvenile arthritis affects about 300,000 American children and teenagers.

A doctor is the best source of information. You may want to talk with a doctor who is an arthritis expert. A rheumatologist is a doctor who treats people with arthritis.

Ask if your hospital has a patient education library. These libraries often have staff that can help you get the facts you need about lupus. Your neighborhood librarian could also help you find good web sites.

Have a regular medical check-up

Talk with your doctor

When you manage a chronic disease like arthritis, you will want to be sure to see your doctor on a regular basis—even when you are feeling well.

Your doctor and others on your medical team can help you learn about arthritis and how to take care of yourself.

People with a chronic disease learn to pay attention to changes in their bodies. You will want to talk with your doctor about any changes and symptoms.

Make a plan together

You and your doctor can work together to find the best way to treat all of your symptoms.

Your treatment will depend on your symptoms.

Over time, you may see special doctors. For example,

- You might see someone who is trained in the care and treatment of people's eyes. This person is called an ophthalmologist.
- You might see someone who is trained in the care and treatment of people's skin. This person is called a dermatologist.

Get support to help with the emotional side of illness

A chronic disease like arthritis can be stressful and hard on your spirit and on your emotions.

You might think that your friends, family and co-workers do not understand how you feel.

You may feel unhappy because you can't do as much as you did before you had arthritis.

Sadness and anger are common emotions.

People with arthritis suggest some helpful hints:

- Stay involved in social activities. Keep up to date with your friends. Let them know that you want to be involved even though you may not be able to do everything.
- Be good to yourself. Take care of your spiritual side. Many people use prayer, relaxation exercises, or meditation.
- Decide what is most important. Spend your time on those important activities and with those people who mean the most to you.

More hints . . .

- Consider joining a support group or seeing a counselor. Counseling is help from a professional who will listen to you and help you develop a plan of action.
- Be sure to ask for help when you need it.
- Share how you are feeling with your family and friends. You can help them understand that the disease sometimes flares up and causes problems.

Move more and eat better

In general, you will need to be as strong and healthy as you can. Moving more and making good food choices will help you.

Move more

- An exercise program helps people with arthritis. Exercise will give you more energy for doing the things you need and want to do. Exercise will help you build strong muscles and keep flexible. This will make your daily tasks easier.
- A physical therapist can help you plan an exercise program. You can learn to change your exercise program depending on how you feel each day.
- Everyone needs to exercise. Exercise can help to improve and maintain your health.

Eat Better

- You might need to take special care about what you eat. This is very important if you have osteoporosis, or take a lot of steroid medicine.
- There is no magic diet that will cure arthritis. A nutritionist can help you decide on a meal plan that fits your needs and is good for you.
- Staying at a healthy weight will help your joints.

Arthritis Words from A to Z

This section of the booklet is called a glossary. A glossary is made up of words and their meanings. This glossary lists words people use when they talk about arthritis. Many of these words are used in books about lupus.

The words are in A to Z order. We show how to say the word. Next we give the meaning of the word. Finally, we use each word in a sentence.

How to Say the Word

You will see parenthesis that look like this () after each word. Here between the () we sound out the word. You will note that some letters are in capital letters. This part of the word is said with a strong beat.

For example, the full name for RA is Rheumatoid Arthritis. We show how to say these words. The first word *rheumatoid*, is written as *ROO ma toyd*. This helps you say the word out loud.

The Word in a Sentence

We use made-up names in the sentences. You may notice that Mary and Carla both have rheumatoid arthritis and see Dr. Guzman for their care. Joe also has rheumatoid arthritis and his doctor is Dr. Healy. Robert has psoriatic arthritis and sees Dr. Jones. Each example sentence begins with a ♦.

Key Words

Arthritis Words from A to Z

A

- Acute** (a KYOOT)
Rapid or sudden start of symptoms. It is sometimes painful and serious.
♦ The winter flu is an **acute** illness because it starts suddenly.
- Aerobic exercise** (a RO bik EK sur size)
Exercise that helps the heart stay healthy and work better.
♦ Robert walks fast every day for **aerobic exercise**.
- Aggravate** (AG ra vate)
Make worse.
♦ Mary **aggravates** her arthritis when she knits for too long.
- Alternative** (all TUR na tiv)
Another choice or a different way.
♦ Carla walks on a treadmill indoors as an **alternative** to running outside in bad weather.
- Annual** (AN yoo ul)
Every year.
♦ Sonia always plans her **annual** breast exam the day after her birthday so she doesn't forget.
- Antibody** (AN tee bod ee)
Proteins in the blood that fight different infections.
♦ The flu vaccine causes your body to make its own **antibodies** that will fight the flu.

Antibiotics (an tee by AH tiks)

Drugs that kill or slow the growth of germs.

◆ Tony took **antibiotics** to treat his ear infection.

Anti-inflammatory (an tee – in FLAM a tor ee)

Something that reduces swelling, heat and pain. It is usually a medicine.

◆ Carla takes **anti-inflammatory** drugs for her arthritis.

Arthritis (ar THRY tis)

A problem with the joints that causes swelling, pain, heat and a sense of stiffness.

◆ Mary finds it hard to pick things up when her **arthritis** is bad because of the pain and swelling in her hands.

Autoimmune disease (au to im MUNE di ZEEZ)

A disease of the immune system that makes your immune system attack your own body.

◆ Rheumatoid arthritis is an **autoimmune disease**.

◆ Joe's joints are swollen because of his **autoimmune disease**.

B

Bacteria (bac TEER ee a)

Germs.

◆ **Bacteria** got into the wound on Gene's hand and caused an infection.

Benign

(be NINE)

Not a danger.

◆ Tony was happy to learn that his tumor was **benign**. He was happy that it was not a danger to his life.

Bursitis

(bur SY tis)

Inflammation of a bursa. A bursa is like a tiny pillow filled with fluid between the tendon and the bone. It is not arthritis because it is outside the joint.

◆ Carla's shoulder **bursitis** is very painful. She cannot lift her arm to comb her hair easily.

C

Cardiovascular (kar dee oh VAS kyoo lar)

Having to do with the heart and blood vessels.

◆ Sonia has a healthy **cardiovascular** system because she exercises everyday.

Cartilage

(KAR tuh lij)

The smooth covering on the end of bones.

◆ Gene's arthritis damaged the **cartilage** in his fingers over the years.

Chronic

(KRAH nik)

Does not go away. Long term.

◆ Arthritis is almost always a **chronic** disease. Joe will have it for the rest of his life.

- Clinical** (KLI ni kal)
 Work or studies in a medical setting that involve patients.
 ♦ Carla is in a **clinical** research study of a new medicine for rheumatoid arthritis.
- Comprehensive** (kom pree HEN siv)
 Complete. Covers everything important.
 ♦ Mary has a **comprehensive** medical exam once a year.
- Conditioning** (kon DI shun ing)
 Physical training to improve how long you can exercise and how strong you are.
 ♦ Mary learned **conditioning** exercises from her physical therapist.
- Contagious disease** (kon TAY jus di ZEEZ)
 An illness that can spread from person to person.
 ♦ Arthritis is not a **contagious disease**, but colds are.
- Control** (kon TROLE)
 To manage, to have power.
 ♦ Robert **controls** his psoriatic arthritis by taking medicines and following his treatment plan.
- Cure** (kyoor)
 To completely get rid of or stop a disease.
 ♦ Mary took antibiotics to **cure** her infection.
 ♦ Today there is no **cure** for arthritis.

Cushingoid (KUSH ing oyd)

Signs and symptoms of high doses of corticosteroids. Some signs are weight gain around the face, as well as the upper back and very thin skin.

◆ Dr. Santos told Linda that her face looked a bit larger because her medicine caused **cushingoid** symptoms.

Cutaneous (kyoo TAY nee us)

Having to do with the skin.

◆ Dr. Jones can see the psoriasis on Robert's elbows. It is a **cutaneous** disease and can be seen on the skin.

D

Deformity (dee FOR mi tee)

A change from the normal shape.

◆ Gene had to buy larger gloves because his arthritis caused some **deformity** of his hands.

Degenerative disease (dee JEN ur a tiv di ZEEZ)

A disease that causes damage over time.

◆ The arthritis in Tony's knees has gotten worse over the years because of a **degenerative disease** called osteoarthritis.

Dermatologist (dur ma TAL oh jist)

A doctor and specialist who treats skin problems.

◆ Robert goes to a **dermatologist** for his psoriasis.

Deteriorate (dee TEE ree oh rate)

Get worse.

◆ Janet now wears glasses because her eyesight has **deteriorated**.

Diagnose (dy ag NOHS)

To figure out what is causing health problems.

◆ Dr. Guzman was able to **diagnose** Mary's rheumatoid arthritis after seeing more symptoms over time.

Diagnosis (dy ag NO sis)

A condition, disease or a medical answer.

◆ Dr. Healy gave Joe a **diagnosis** of rheumatoid arthritis after a check-up, some tests and hearing Joe's story.

Dose (dohs)

An amount of medicine.

◆ Gene takes one 10mg **dose** of an anti-inflammatory medicine every morning. If his arthritis is acting up, he may need a larger **dose**.

E

Effective (ee FEK tiv)

Works well.

◆ Janet wears a hat with a big brim. This is an **effective** way to keep the sun off her face.

Environment (en VY ro ment)

All the things in a place where we live. This includes the inside, such as our homes and workplaces. This also includes the outside, such as air, water and weather.
♦ The **environment** can cause an illness. It can also make symptoms better or worse.

Episode (EP i sode)

A specific event with a beginning and an end.
♦ Janet had a short **episode** of chest pain.

Erosions (ee RO zhuns)

Small pits or holes in the cartilage or the bone.
♦ Dr. Healy looked at the x-ray and saw **erosions** in Joe's hip.

Exert (eg ZERT)

To push or work hard.
♦ Carla **exerts** herself when she walks up an extra flight of stairs.

F

Fast (fast)

To go without any food or drink.
♦ Janet was told to **fast** for 12 hours before her blood test.

Fatigue (fa TEEG)

A tired or weak feeling of the whole body.
♦ Joe felt a sense of **fatigue**; so he rested when he got home.

Flare

(flare)

A period of time when symptoms of a disease are worse.

◆ Mary had a **flare** of her arthritis for two months.

Flexibility

(FLEK suh bil a tee)

Able to move with ease. Muscles and joints that stretch easily.

◆ Dr. Healy said that exercise would increase Joe's **flexibility**.

G

Glaucoma

(glaw KO ma)

An eye disease where there is increased pressure from the inside of the eye. Too much pressure over time can lead to blindness.

◆ Sonia goes to the eye doctor every two years to check for **glaucoma**.

Glaucoma can be a side effect of high doses of steroids.

H

Hormones

(HOR mones)

Natural chemicals made by your body. Scientists can also make them. These chemicals are important for many body functions.

◆ Cortisone is a **hormone** made by your body. Prednisone is the pill form of this **hormone**.

I

Immune System (im MUNE sis tum)

The part of your body that fights against germs and foreign substances.

◆ Joe's **immune system** went right to work to fight germs when he got a deep cut.

Infection (in FEK shun)

An illness that is caused by germs.

◆ Gene taught his son how to take care of a cut so he will not get an **infection**.

Inherit (in HER it)

To get a trait or a feature from your ancestors.

◆ Tony **inherited** his good eyesight from his father.

Inflammation (in fla MAY shun)

Swelling, redness, heat and pain. This happens when parts of your body are hurt or react to illness. The body sends extra blood cells to the place that is hurt.

◆ Steroid medicines reduce **inflammation**.

Infusion (in FYOO zhun)

A way to give fluids or medicine directly into a vein.

◆ Carla goes to the hospital every 8 weeks for her **infusion** of arthritis medicine.

Inhibit (in HI bit)

To stop or hold back something.

◆ Janet takes a medicine to **inhibit** her immune system.

Injection (in JEK shun)

To give medicine by needle under the skin, into a muscle or into a joint.

◆ Robert gives himself his arthritis medicine by **injection** two times a week.

Intravenous (in tra VEE nus)

Putting fluids or medicine into a vein by using a needle.

◆ Sonia receives an **intravenous** medicine from the visiting nurse.

Itis (eye tyss)

These letters are found at the end of a word. It means swelling or inflamed in the Greek language. *Arth* is a Greek word meaning joint. When you add *itis*, this word now reads *arthritis*.

Here are other examples:

◆ Neph**ritis** means inflammation of the kidney.

◆ Myocard**itis** means inflammation of the heart muscle.

J

Joint (joynt)

The place where two bones come together. This is where we can bend and move.

◆ Mary has trouble buttoning her blouse when her finger **joints** are stiff.

K

We don't have any "K" words, but you may.
Write your "K" words here:

L

Ligament (LIG a ment)
A strong band that holds a joint together.
♦ Tony tore two knee **ligaments** when he played football.

Localized (LO ka lized)
In a small area or only in one place.
♦ Janet's rash was **localized** to her face.
She did not have it anywhere else.

Long-term (long – term)
For a long time, more than just weeks or months.
♦ Sonia's mother needed **long-term** care after she broke her hip.

M

Manage (MAN ej)
To control or direct.
♦ Robert's health care team taught him to **manage** his psoriatic arthritis with medicine, exercise and good planning.

- Medication** (med I KAY shun)
A medicine or drug to treat an injury, illness or disease. Some medications must be prescribed by a doctor. Others can be bought in a drug store without a prescription.
♦ Mary gets her arthritis **medications** at her local drug store.
- Mild**
Something that is gentle and not harsh or severe.
♦ Robert had a **mild** flare and was still able to work.
- Mobility** (mo BIL a tee)
Able to move around.
♦ Surgery improved Carla's **mobility**. She is now able to walk to the store.
- Moderate** (MA dur it)
Between mild and serious; between weak and strong.
♦ Mary takes time to rest when she has **moderate** symptoms.
- Monitor** (MA ni tur)
To watch and check something carefully for changes.
♦ Dr. Guzman sees Carla every two months to **monitor** her arthritis.

N

Narcotic

(nar KA dik)

A strong medicine that takes away pain. It can make you sleepy and your body can grow to need it.

◆ You should not drive when you take a **narcotic** because you may fall asleep at the wheel.

Neurologic

(nur a LA jik)

Having to do with the nervous system. The nervous system includes nerves, the spinal cord and the brain.

◆ One sign of a **neurological** problem may be a constant feeling of pins and needles.

Nutrition

(noo TRI shun)

Food. Healthy eating to help your body grow and repair itself.

◆ A healthy diet provides **nutrition** for your body.

O

Occasionally

(oh KAY zhun a lee)

Sometimes, not often.

◆ Mary **occasionally** forgets to take her medicine but she remembers most of the time.

Occupational Therapist (ah kyoo PAY shun ul
THEHR a pist)

A professional who helps people who are ill or injured learn better ways to do everyday activities such as bathing, dressing, cooking, eating, or driving. Also known as an OT.

◆ The **occupational therapist** taught Carla how to set up her kitchen and office space to lessen the stress on her hands.

Orthopedic Surgeon (or tho PEE dik sur jun)

A doctor who operates on bones and joints.

◆ Robert's **orthopedic surgeon** has done many operations to replace damaged joints.

Osteonecrosis (ah stee oh ne KRO sis)

Death of a bone or part of a bone from not getting enough blood. It can be caused by many diseases and from steroid use.

◆ Joe had a lot of pain in his hip. Dr. Healy told him that he had **osteonecrosis** because he had taken steroids for many years.

Osteoporosis (ah stee oh por OH sis)

Thin and weak bones which break easily.

◆ **Osteoporosis** is common in older women and in people who need to take steroids.

P

Permanent (PUR ma nent)

Never goes away.

◆ Mary's arthritis caused **permanent** joint damage. Surgery can improve her motion but it cannot make the damage go away.

Persistent (pur SIS tent)

Lasts for a long time.

◆ Janet had a **persistent** cough for two months and went to the doctor to find out why.

Pharmacist (FAR ma sist)

A trained person who prepares medicine. This person makes sure you get the right kind and amount of medicine that your doctor ordered.

◆ The **pharmacist** filled Joe's prescription for prednisone.

Physical Therapist (fi si kal THEHR a pist)

A trained professional who helps patients learn ways to decrease their pain. Also known as a PT. A PT helps patients increase and maintain their motion and strength.

◆ The **physical therapist** taught Carla how to change her exercise program when her arthritis was in flare.

Platelet (PLATE let)

Cells in the blood that help stop bleeding.

◆ Tony's **platelets** are low. He gets a lot of nose bleeds.

Psoriasis (so RYE ah sis)
A dry scaly skin rash.
◆ Often, **psoriasis** is on the elbows, knees and skin on the top of the head.

Psoriatic Arthritis (sore ee AAH tick ar THRY tis)
A disease which causes psoriasis on the skin and inflammation in many joints. See page 4 for more information.

Psychiatrist (sy KY a trist)
A doctor who treats people for emotional problems or mental illness.
◆ The **psychiatrist** helped Mary understand that it made sense for her to be upset. Mary's visits to the **psychiatrist** helped her to cope with her arthritis and to feel better.

Prescription (pre SKRIP shun)
Written directions from your doctor to the pharmacist about your medicine. Also known as Rx or a "script."
◆ Joe can only get prednisone with a **prescription** from his doctor.

Prevent (pre VENT)
To keep from happening.
◆ Good health habits can help **prevent** heart disease or even cancer.

Progression (pro GRESH un)
To move forward for better or for worse.
◆ New medicines can slow down the **progression** of arthritis.

Q

We don't have any "Q" words, but you may.
Write your "Q" words here:

R

Radiologist (ray dee AL oh jist)

A doctor who looks at and studies x-rays and other images to diagnose health problems.

- ◆ The **radiologist** looked at the x-ray of Carla's hip and told her that she had osteoporosis.

Raynaud's Syndrome (ray NODES SIN drome)

A medical problem that causes the blood vessels in the fingers and toes to narrow and let less blood through when they are cold. The fingers and toes become pale and feel uncomfortable.

- ◆ Sonia always wears gloves when she goes out in the cold because she has **Raynaud's Syndrome**.

Reaction (ree AK shun)

A response. An action that happens because of another event.

- ◆ Joe had a rash and Dr. Healy said it was a **reaction** to his new medicine.

- Regular** (REG yoo lar)
Usual, normal.
♦ Mary walks three times a week on a **regular** schedule.
- Relief** (ree LEEF)
Feeling better.
♦ A warm shower gives Gene **relief** from his morning stiffness.
- Remission** (ree MI shun)
A period of time when a disease is not active.
♦ Robert's arthritis has been in **remission** for six months.
- Rheumatoid Arthritis** (ROO ma toyd ar THRY tis)
A disease which causes inflammation in many joints. See Page 4 for more information.
♦ Sonia had pain in her joints and her family doctor sent her to a specialist. She learned that she had **rheumatoid arthritis**.
- Rheumatologist** (roo ma TAL oh jist)
A doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating problems of the immune system, joints and bones.
♦ Sonia's family doctor was not sure of the cause of her joint pain, so he sent her to a **rheumatologist**.

S

- Schedule** (SKEH jyool)
A plan. Planning a time to do something.
♦ Carla's nurse, Ms. Green, helped her to make a **schedule** so she would know when to take her pills.
♦ Carla used her kitchen calendar to **schedule** her appointments.
- Sensitive** (SEN si tiv)
Easily hurt or damaged.
♦ Janet's skin is very **sensitive** to the sun because of the medicines she takes. She needs to wear very strong sunscreen.
- Severe** (suh VEER)
Very serious or very bad.
♦ Mary stayed out of work because of **severe** fatigue.
- Side effect** (SIDE effect)
A reaction caused by a medicine.
♦ Sonia told her friends that she gained weight as a **side effect** of her steroids.
- Sign** (sine)
A medical problem that can be seen or noticed by a doctor.
♦ Joint tenderness is often a **sign** of arthritis.
- Sjogren's Syndrome** (SHOW grins SIN drome)
A medical problem that causes the eyes and mouth to be dry.
♦ Michael puts medicine drops in his eyes three times a day because he has **Sjogren's Syndrome**.

- Soreness** (SORE ness)
Hurt, pain or ache.
♦ Mary has **soreness** in her wrists from gardening.
- Spasm** (SPAZ um)
A sudden tightening of muscles.
♦ Michael had a muscle **spasm** in his back after painting his son's room.
- Stable** (STAY bul)
No change.
♦ Dr. Jones told Robert that his arthritis is **stable** since his symptoms have not gotten worse and he is feeling well.
- Stamina** (STA min a)
Endurance. Able to be active over an entire day without feeling tired or exhausted.
♦ Carla does not have enough **stamina** to work full-time.
- Steroid** (STER oyd)
Medicines used to decrease inflammation.
♦ Corticosteroids are the **steroids** used to treat lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. Hydrocortisone and prednisone are examples of steroids.
♦ Dr. Guzman increases Mary's **steroid** dose when her arthritis is very active.

- Stress** (stress)
Physical, mental or emotional tension or strain.
♦ Mary notices that there is a lot of **stress** at work just before the holidays. This could cause her arthritis to flare up.
- Supplement** (SUP luh ment)
To complete or add to.
♦ Gene takes vitamins to **supplement** his diet.
- Suppress** (sa PRES)
To hold back.
♦ Dr. Guzman gave Carla steroids because they **suppress** inflammation.
- Surgery** (SUR ger ee)
An operation.
♦ Tony walked better after his knee **surgery**.
- Susceptible** (sus SEP tuh bul)
More open to.
♦ Robert's medicine helps his psoriatic arthritis. But the medicine also makes him more **susceptible** to infection.
- Swelling** (SWEL ing)
An increase in size because of fluid. The body's response to injury or illness.
♦ Robert put ice on his knee to reduce the **swelling**.

Symptom (SIMP tum)
A feeling or physical sign that may be due to an illness or disease.
♦ Tony felt stiff every morning. This was his first **symptom** of arthritis.

Systemic (sis TE mik)
In all parts of the body.
♦ Rheumatoid arthritis is a **systemic** disease because it involves many joints and tendons and can cause inflammation in other parts of the body.

I

Taper (TAPE ur)
To slowly lower or cut down; to make smaller.
♦ Janet was sure to **taper** her dose of steroids over two weeks. She knew that it was dangerous to just stop taking her steroids.

Temporary (TEM pur ar ee)
Does not last. Only for a short period of time.
♦ Tony needed to take a nap every afternoon. He knew this was only **temporary**.

Therapy (THEHR a pee)
Action to help a disease, illness, or injury.
♦ Carla walks every day as **therapy** for her arthritis.

Treat (treet)
To give care.
◆ Dr. Smith **treats** Tony for his arthritis.

Treatment (TREET ment)
The action or medicine used to take care of a disease or injury.
◆ Carla's **treatment** for her arthritis includes medicine and therapy.

U

Ulcer (UL sur)
An open sore that can be inside or outside of the body.
◆ Janet has to take medicine to help her stomach **ulcer** heal.

V

Vague (vayg)
Unclear. Not for sure
◆ Sonia's symptoms were **vague** so Dr. Healy could not make a clear diagnosis.

We don't have any words for the following letters, but you may. Write other words here:

W

_____	_____
_____	_____

X

_____	_____
_____	_____

Y

_____	_____
_____	_____

Z

_____	_____
_____	_____

Abbreviations

FDA	The Food and Drug Administration. The FDA is a government agency that makes rules about food and drugs to keep them safe.
IV	Intravenous. IV means into the vein.
mg	Milligram. Mg is a unit of weight. It is used as an amount of medicine.
RA	Rheumatoid Arthritis. (ROO ma toyd ar THRY tis)
SLE	Systemic Lupus Erythematosus. (sis TE mik LOO puss er ri THEM a toe sis)
SPF	Skin Protection Factor SPF is represented as a number. This number tells you the strength of a sunscreen product. For example, an SPF of 30 offers good protection.
UVA and UVB	Ultraviolet rays A and ultraviolet rays B. Both UVA and UVB rays are parts of sunlight.

Common Tests

- ANA** Antinuclear Antibody
An **ANA** is a test for abnormal antibodies.
- EKG** Electrocardiogram.
An **EKG** is an electric recording of the heart.
- ESR** Erythrocyte (ir RITH ro cite) Sedimentation Rate **ESR** is a blood test.
- Hematocrit** The percent of blood that is made up of red blood cells.
- X-Ray** A picture of the bones and other parts inside of the body.

Places to Go for Care and Testing

- Cardiology** (kar dee AL oh gee)
The medical department that treats heart problems.
- Dermatology** (dur ma TAL oh gee)
The medical department that treats skin problems.
- Nephrology** (nef RAL oh gee)
The medical department that treats kidney problems.
- Neurology** (nur AL oh gee)
The medical department that treats problems of the brain and nervous system.
- Nutrition** (noo TRI shun)
The medical department that focuses on food and diet.
- Occupational Therapy** (ah kyoo PAY shun al THEHR a pee)
Part of the rehabilitation department. This type of therapy helps patients learn easier ways to do every day activities. Also known as OT.
- Orthopedics** (orth oh PEE diks)
The medical department that treats bone and joint problems — usually with surgery.

Physical Therapy (fi si kal THEHR a pee)

Part of the rehabilitation department. This type of therapy helps patients learn ways to decrease their pain and to increase and keep their motion and strength. Also known as PT.

Podiatry (po DY a tree)

The medical department that treats problems of the feet.

Psychiatry (sy KY a tree)

The medical department that treats people with mental or emotional problems.

Pulmonology (pull muh NAL oh gee)

The medical department that treats lung problems.

Radiology (ray dee AL oh gee)

The medical department that uses x-rays and other images to help diagnose medical problems.

Rheumatology (roo ma TAL oh gee)

The medical department that treats problems of the immune system, joints and bones.

Words to Ask About

Word

Meaning in Plain English

Places To Call For More Information

YOUR LOCAL NUMBERS

NATIONAL RESOURCES

National Arthritis Foundation

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 7669
Atlanta, GA 30357-0669
Telephone Number: 1-800-568-4045 (free call)
Magazine: *Arthritis Today*
Internet Address: www.arthritis.org

National Psoriasis Foundation

Mailing Address: Suite 300 6600 SW 92nd Avenue
Portland, OR 97223
Telephone Number: 1-800-723-9166 (free call)
Internet Address: www.psoriasis.org

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS) Information Clearinghouse

Mailing Address: National Institutes of Health (NIH)
1 AMS Circle
Bethesda, MD 20892-3675
Telephone Number: 1-877-226-4267 (free call)
Internet Address: www.niams.nih.gov

“The shorter and the
plainer the better.”

—Beatrix Potter

This booklet is available
for downloading at
www.hsph.harvard.edu/healthliteracy.

