

# RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

**Definition:** A connective tissue disease characterized by chronic inflammatory changes in the synovial membranes and other structures, by migratory swelling and stiffness of the joints in its early stage, and by a variable degree of deformity, ankylosis, and invalidism in its late stage.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Pathophysiology:** The fundamental pathologic lesion is an inflammatory process beginning in the synovial membrane. The inflammation of the synovial membrane is characterized by vascular dilatation, edema, and fibrinous exudates. In the early stages, the affectation is limited to the synovium and remission commonly occurs and results in subsidence of the inflammation. However, in chronic and long standing cases, permanent destruction of the cartilage and fibrosis of the periarticular tissues occur.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Affected People/Population:** Varies little in differences in climate and occurs throughout the world. Women are affected almost 3 times as often as men; 80% of the cases begin in persons between 25-50 years of age.<sup>1</sup>

**Medications:** Salicylates are most helpful when alleviating pain and suppressing inflammation. Aspirin is the most common used drug for the relief of symptoms. Also used are gold salts and phenylbutazone.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

**Surgery:** Operations are chosen with great regard for the qualifications and needs of individual patients. Examples of such operations are capsulectomy (surgical release of the constricted or adherent joint capsule) and arthroplasty (replacement of part/s of a joint)<sup>1,6</sup>

**Physical Therapy:** Local applications of hot packs, infrared radiation, whirlpool baths, or diathermy may alleviate the acute pain. To minimize joint stiffness and muscle atrophy, active exercise of the affected joints should be carried out. In case of severe acute pain, it is advisable to immobilize the part in a light splint or plaster cast. Exercise should be prescribed to develop muscles that overcome or resist potential deformities.<sup>1,2,4,5</sup>

## References:

1. Handbook of Orthopaedic Surgery 10<sup>th</sup> Ed. By Brasher and Raney
2. Physical Rehabilitation by O'Sullivan 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.
3. MIMS (Medical Index of Medical Specialties) 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter 2006
4. Rehabilitation Medicine by De Lisa 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.
5. Therapeutic Exercise by Kissner 4<sup>th</sup> Ed.
6. Merriam-Webster's Medical Dictionary