

What is rheumatoid arthritis?

- rheumatoid arthritis is the painful swelling of the joints, thought to be caused by the body's own immune system attacking itself
 - it often begins to affect people between 40 and 60, and is three times more common in women than in men
 - over 690,000 adults in the UK live with the condition
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Smoking and rheumatoid arthritis

- smoking is a major preventable risk factor for rheumatoid arthritis
- smoking triggers a reaction in the immune system which can promote the onset of rheumatoid arthritis
- the increased risk due to smoking is dependent both on the amount of smoking and an individual's genetic make-up
- smoking may be a factor in almost a quarter of rheumatoid arthritis cases
- the proportion of rheumatoid arthritis attributable to smoking is similar to that seen for some heart disease
- heavy smoking (20 a day for 20 years) approximately doubles the odds of rheumatoid arthritis in both men and women
- even light smoking is associated with an increased risk of rheumatoid arthritis in women, smoking one to seven cigarettes a day was found to more than double the risk
- people with rheumatoid arthritis have an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, lymphoma and lung cancer, and osteoporosis compared to the general population and these are also established risk factors of smoking
- smoking can compromise the effectiveness of rheumatoid arthritis medications
- rheumatoid arthritis may be more severe in smokers than in non-smokers
- it may take up to 20 years after stopping smoking for the increased risk to disappear.