



A Wide Range of Symptoms

Rheumatism-- Rheumatic disorders consist of more than a hundred disease forms. They often cause chronic pain which affects the joints and muscles. During recent years there has been a lot of progress in treating rheumatic diseases.

TEXT: JANE FUNKE AND HANNELORE GIESSEN

The most common inflammatory *joint* disease is rheumatoid arthritis. However, rheumatic inflammation can also affect other organs such as the skin, the *vessels*, the *connective tissue* or the eyes. Women are affected by rheumatic diseases slightly more often than men.

Rheumatic diseases, including most forms of arthritis and inflammatory *spinal conditions*, are usually painful, chronic, and progressive, which means they get worse as time goes on. Early diagnosis and treatment are essential because then the progression of many rheumatic diseases can be slowed down.

Signs and Symptoms

The following are some of the most common symptoms of arthritis and rheumatic diseases:

- joint pain
- swelling of one or more joints
- joint stiffness that lasts for at least one hour in the early morning

- chronic pain or *tenderness* in one or more joints
- warmth or redness in the area of a joint

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- limited movement in an affected joint
- fatigue.

Diagnosing a rheumatic disease is not often easy, as generally, no single test can reveal the precise disorder. After a thorough examination to check for visible signs of swelling, stiffness, or redness in the joints, lab tests will usually follow to help rule out other potential causes of the symptoms.

Blood and urine tests can amongst other things, help to detect **inflammation markers**, certain rheumatoid factors and abnormal organ function. Imaging tests, such as X-rays, computerized tomography (CT) scans, magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans, or ultrasound scans of joints and bones can help to reveal inflammation and **fluid build-up** and to discover changes that may have taken place. In many cases there may be no specific test, and it is often a case of eliminating other conditions before reaching the correct diagnosis.

Treatment and Medication Options

Various types of medication are prescribed to treat rheumatic diseases, along with drugs used to relieve the symptoms including pain and inflammation. The most important ones include

- Corticosteroids
- **Disease-modifying** anti-rheumatic drugs (DMARDs), which can slow the progression of rheumatic diseases by affecting the body's immune reactions and inflammatory processes. DMARDs, such as leflunomide or methotrexate, have greatly improved the quality of life for many people with rheumatoid arthritis.

While DMARDs target the immune system, they can also weaken its ability to fight infections.

- Biologics, a subclass of DMARDs that target specific steps in the body's inflammatory processes. The most important ones are adalimumab, etanercept, infliximab and anakinra.



Vocabulary

English	Deutsch
joint	Gelenk
vessel	Gefäß
connective tissue	Bindegewebe
spinal conditions	Erkrankungen der Wirbelsäule
tenderness	hier: Empfindlichkeit
inflammation marker	Entzündungsparameter
fluid build-up	Flüssigkeitsansammlung
disease-modifying	krankheitsmodifizierend
discomfort	hier: Beschwerden
to keep an eye on s.th	etw. im Auge behalten
adherence	hier: Adhärenz, Therapietreue
grain pillow	Körnerkissen
disposition	Veranlagung
to be imperative	unbedingt notwendig sein
tick	Zecke
Lyme disease	Lyme-Borreliose
ointment	Salbe
comfrey	Beinwell
to dispose of s.th	etw. entsorgen
residual waste	Restmüll

Anzeige

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- Janus kinase (JAK) inhibitors, a DMARD subclass that target Janus kinase (JAK) pathways which are involved in the body's immune system response. Baricitinib, tofacitinib and filgotinib are JAK inhibitors available for oral use.

Drugs that help to deal with pain and *discomfort* are comprised of oral analgesics such as acetaminophen, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), including ibuprofen and naproxen sodium and the COX-2 inhibitors. In more severe cases opioids may be applied.

Patients often don't take just one but several drugs over a long period of time. Most drugs administered for rheumatic disorders have a high interaction potential. It is therefore not only important for the pharmaceutical staff to *keep an eye on* the pati-



ent's *adherence* to their doctor's orders but also to be aware of the risk of possible drug-drug-interaction. *

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Dialogue

PTA: Good morning, what can I do for you?

Customer: I'd like something for the pain in my knee.

PTA: How long have you had it?

Customer: It's been this bad for about a week.

PTA: Have you injured it in any way?

Customer: No, it just seemed to appear from nowhere.

PTA: Can you describe how it feels?

Customer: Well to begin with, the knee was just a bit stiff in the morning. Then it started hurting as I was hurrying to the bus stop on my way to work. The more I move, the worse it gets.

PTA: Is it swollen?

Customer: Yes, and tender.

PTA: What have you done so far?

Customer: I've been putting my feet up in the evenings with a cold compress on my knee and I've taken a painkiller once or twice this week. It hasn't really helped though.

PTA: A hot water bottle or a **grain pillow** may be better to relax the muscles but whether hot or cold is better, is often a case of trial and error! Is there anyone in your family with similar problems? A genetic **disposition** is not unusual

Customer: My mother had to have a knee replacement in her seventies but she had rheumatoid arthritis. I hope I don't have the same.

PTA: Well, in that case, you should definitely see your healthcare provider as soon as possible. Early diagnosis is **imperative** in order to prevent damage to the joint. You may even be referred to a specialist for tests.

Customer: Oh dear. What kind of tests would that involve?

PTA: Blood tests to determine inflammatory processes in the body and if you've been bitten by a **tick**, to eliminate **Lyme disease**. There will be X-rays and possibly MRI scanning.

Customer: Is the damage to the joint reversible?

PTA: Well, currently we don't really know what it is. In any case, early diagnosis is important as in many cases it's possible to achieve clinical remission.

Customer: Can I do anything to reduce the pain?

PTA: I can recommend external treatment with **pain ointment** containing diclofenac for example. If you prefer a natural product, you could choose an ointment with **comfrey**. If you use the diclofenac formula, you should remove any superfluous cream with a tissue and **dispose of** it in the **residual household waste** instead of washing it off.

Diclofenac has been found in lakes and rivers and it harms the fish population. That should be avoided whenever possible.

Customer: How awful! I don't want that! What else can I do?

PTA: An appointment with your doctor should have top priority. Would you like me to show you the applications?

Customer: Yes please. Do you stock grain pillows too?

PTA: We do.

Customer: You've been very helpful. Thank you.

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