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Rheumatoid Arthritis Factsheet

What Can Science Do for Me?

This 5 x 30 minutes series of films takes five individuals each with a chronic health condition to meet the scientists working on treatment, prevention and diagnosis of their particular condition. The series was funded by the Wellcome Trust and made by Media Trust Productions

Rheumatoid Arthritis – Debbie's Journey

Thirty four year-old Debbie Grice was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis while still a student at the Royal College of Art. Her career as a painter was suddenly cut short as she struggled to cope with this disabling condition. Rheumatoid arthritis attacks the joints causing permanent damage and disability and Debbie wants to know what research scientists are doing to find better treatments and perhaps a cure. The film follows Debbie and her husband Andrew as they meet some of the scientists leading the way in RA research and also describes her artistic journey - showing the impact of her condition on her art and how she now hopes to resurrect her career.

What is Rheumatoid Arthritis?

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is a painful, chronic and usually progressive disease which occurs when, for no known reason, the body's immune system starts attacking and damaging joints and soft tissues surrounding the bones. It is very different from the better-known type of arthritis, affecting older people, which is osteoarthritis.

Key Facts

- It is a lifelong condition.
- It is not an older person's disease. People can develop it any age, even as children. The most common age of onset is between 40 and 60 – often when people are in the prime of their working life.
- There is no obvious pattern to symptoms and everybody's disease is different. People get 'flares', or periods when symptoms are much worse, which then subside. They can have periods when the disease is quiet and causes them no problems.
- The main symptoms are joint pain, stiffness and swelling. Any joint may be affected, but it is commonly the hands, wrists and feet. Some people also have difficulty in sleeping, feel intensely tired and feel like they have bad 'flu. It doesn't only affect the joints - it can affect other parts of the body.

- It is an 'auto-immune disease' – it results from a problem with the body's immune system.
- Left untreated, it can cause serious damage to joints. The membrane surrounding the joint (the synovial membrane) becomes inflamed and fluid and cells leak into the joint space, causing swelling. The inflamed membrane damages the cartilage and bone. Eventually the bone can wear away and the whole joint can become weakened, damaged and deformed.

What treatment is there?

There have been significant advances in the treatment of RA. People are diagnosed early and treated early, with drugs that control the disease process, or with new 'biologic' treatments that target parts of the immune system. Once the disease is well controlled, the signs and symptoms can be managed effectively, and people have less joint damage than used to be the case. They can remain active and continue to enjoy satisfying and productive working lives.

Organisations

National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society (NRAS)

NRAS provides support and information for people with Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) and Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis, their families, friends and carers, and health professionals with an interest in Rheumatoid Arthritis.

Address: Unit B4 Westacott Business Centre, Westacott Way, Littlewick Green, Maidenhead SL6 3RT

Helpline: 0800 298 7650 (Mon-Fri between 9.30am - 4.30pm)

Tel: 0845 458 3969

Fax: 0845 458 3971

Email: enquiries@rheumatoid.org.uk

Website: <http://www.rheumatoid.org.uk>



Arthritis Care

There are nine million people with arthritis in the UK – rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis - each affected in a unique way. Arthritis Care is a user-led organisation which provides high quality information and support to enable people to take control of their arthritis.

Address: 18 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HD

Tel: 020 7380 6500

Email: info@arthritiscare.org.uk

Website: <http://www.arthritiscare.org.uk>

Arthritis Research Campaign (ARC)

ARC is the fourth largest medical research charity in the UK. It raises funds to promote medical research into the cause, treatment and cure of arthritic conditions;

to educate medical students, doctors and allied healthcare professionals about arthritis, and provide information to the general public.

Address: St Mary's Court, St Mary's Gate, Chesterfield, Derbys. S41 7TD

Tel: 0870 850 5000

Email: info@arc.org.uk

Website: <http://www.arc.org.uk>

The Wellcome Trust

The Wellcome Trust was established in 1936 and is an independent charity funding research to improve human and animal health. It is the UK's largest non-governmental source of funds for biomedical research.

Address: Gibbs Building, 215 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE.

Tel: 020 7611 8888

Fax 020 7611 8545

Email: contact@wellcome.ac.uk

Website: <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/>

Community Channel

Community Channel is a not-for-profit, free to air television channel in the UK launched in September 2000. Owned by the Media Trust, a registered charity, its remit is to give a voice to community groups, charities of all sizes and not-for-profit organizations through using news, current affairs, documentaries and lifestyle programming.

Web: <http://www.communitychannel.org/>

Tel: 08708 505500

Email: info@communitychannel.org

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