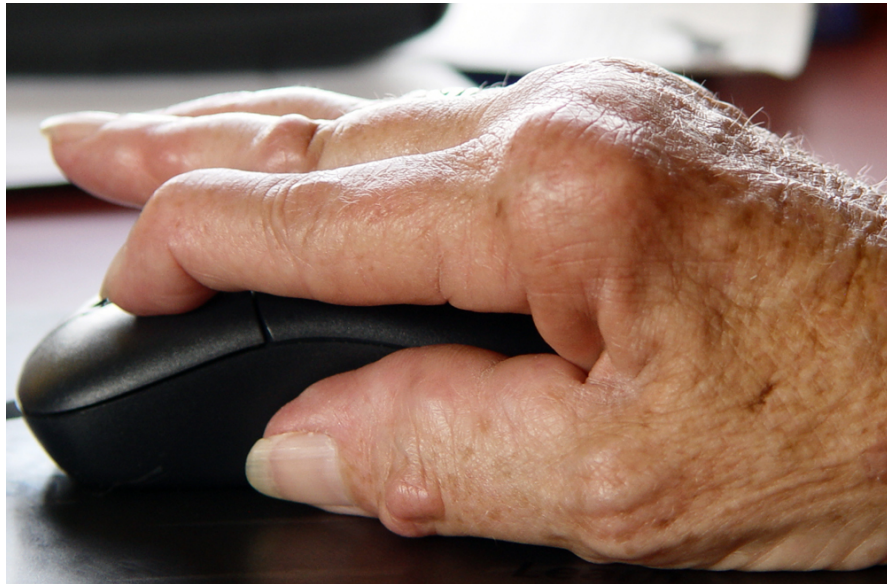




Rheumatoid Arthritis of the Hand



Overview

Rheumatoid arthritis (we say "RA") is a chronic autoimmune disease. It affects joints throughout your body. For many people, it starts in the hands. This can impact your quality of life.

Causes

What causes rheumatoid arthritis? Well, we don't fully understand this disease. We know it happens when your immune system attacks your body's own cells. It may be linked to your genes. It may be linked to something you are exposed to in your environment. And, your hormones may play a role.

Symptoms

What are the symptoms? Unlike osteoarthritis, which often affects only a single joint, RA tends to affect both sides of your body equally. Your hands and wrists may feel stiff and painful, especially in the morning. Your hands, finger joints and wrists may swell. Your skin may appear red and puffy. Lumps or hard nodules may form just under your skin. As the disease progresses, your fingers may shift out of their normal alignment. Typically, your fingers will shift away from your thumbs. These changes make it hard for you to do things like fasten buttons and open medication bottles. And you can develop problems like carpal tunnel syndrome and other issues.

Treatment

How do we treat it? There is no cure for rheumatoid arthritis, but there are ways to manage it. You may benefit from medications and lifestyle changes. You may also benefit from hand splints or braces. You can modify your daily activities and use assistive devices to help you perform daily tasks. And, you may benefit from surgery. Your doctor will create a plan that's right for you.