



UNDERSTANDING INFLAMMATORY CONDITIONS



A Patient Guide





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This booklet will help you learn about inflammatory conditions that affect the skin, joints, and digestive system. You will find out what causes inflammation, how these conditions are treated, and what you can do to manage your symptoms and feel better.

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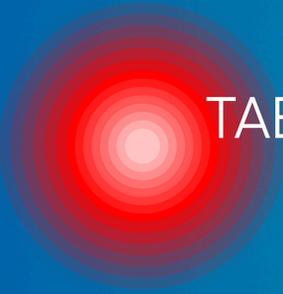


TABLE OF CONTENT



What's Inside

What is Inflammation?	4
Types of Inflammatory Conditions	5
Skin Conditions (Dermatologic)	6
Joint Conditions (Rheumatologic)	7
Digestive Conditions (GI)	8
Causes and Risk Factors	9
How Are These Conditions Diagnosed?	10
Treatment Options	11
Biologic Medications	12
Living with an Inflammatory Condition	13
Tips for Taking Your Medication	14
When to Call Your Doctor	15
Glossary of Terms	16
Resources	17

WHAT IS INFLAMMATION?



Inflammation is your body's natural response to injury or infection. When you cut your finger, the area becomes red, warm, and swollen - that's inflammation at work, helping your body heal.

But sometimes the immune system makes a mistake. It attacks healthy tissues as if they were harmful invaders. This causes chronic inflammation that doesn't go away on its own.

Think of it this way: Your immune system is like a security guard. Normally, it protects you from germs and helps heal injuries. In autoimmune and inflammatory conditions, the security guard gets confused and starts attacking the very building it's supposed to protect.

Key Terms to Know

Inflammation: The body's response to injury or infection, causing redness, swelling, heat, and pain.

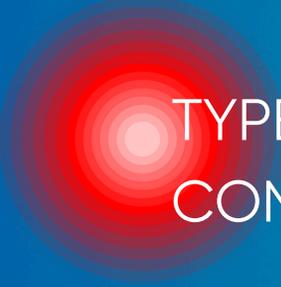
Autoimmune Disease: A condition where the immune system mistakenly attacks healthy cells.

Chronic: Long-lasting or recurring over time.

Flare: A period when symptoms get worse.

References:

1. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. "Autoimmune Diseases." NIAID, NIH. <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/diseases-conditions/autoimmune-diseases>
2. American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association. "Autoimmune Disease List." aarda.org.



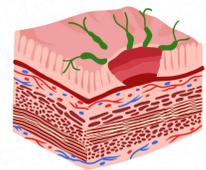
TYPES OF INFLAMMATORY CONDITIONS

Inflammatory conditions can affect different parts of the body:

DERMATOLOGIC (SKIN)

Conditions that cause inflammation of the skin:

- Psoriasis
- Atopic Dermatitis (Eczema)
- Hidradenitis Suppurativa



RHEUMATOLOGIC (JOINTS & CONNECTIVE TISSUE)

Conditions that cause inflammation of joints and connective tissues:

- Rheumatoid Arthritis
- Psoriatic Arthritis
- Ankylosing Spondylitis
- Lupus (SLE)

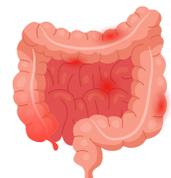


GASTROINTESTINAL (DIGESTIVE SYSTEM)

Conditions that cause inflammation of the digestive tract:

- Crohn's Disease
- Ulcerative Colitis

(Together called Inflammatory Bowel Disease or IBD)



Important: Many inflammatory conditions are connected. For example, people with psoriasis may also develop psoriatic arthritis. People with IBD may have joint or skin symptoms too.

References:

1. American College of Rheumatology. "Diseases & Conditions." rheumatology.org.
2. Crohn's & Colitis Foundation. "What is IBD?" crohnscolitisfoundation.org.



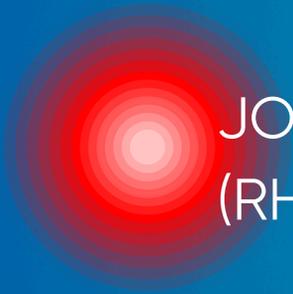
SKIN CONDITIONS (DERMATOLOGIC)



<p>PSORIASIS</p>	<p>A condition where skin cells grow too quickly, causing thick, scaly patches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Red or pink patches covered with silvery scales• Commonly affects elbows, knees, scalp, lower back• Can cause itching, burning, or soreness• May affect nails (pitting, discoloration)• About 30% develop psoriatic arthritis
<p>ATOPIC DERMATITIS (ECZEMA)</p>	<p>A condition causing dry, itchy, inflamed skin.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intense itching (often worse at night)• Dry, cracked, scaly skin• Red or brownish-gray patches• Common in skin folds (elbows, knees, neck)• Often begins in childhood but can occur at any age
<p>HIDRADENITIS SUPPURATIVA (HS)</p>	<p>A condition causing painful lumps under the skin.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Painful bumps or boils in areas where skin rubs together• Commonly affects armpits, groin, buttocks, under breasts• Bumps may break open and drain fluid• Can cause scarring and tunnels under the skin

References:

1. National Psoriasis Foundation. "About Psoriasis." psoriasis.org.
2. National Eczema Association. "What is Eczema?" nationaleczema.org.
3. HS Foundation. "What is HS?" hs-foundation.org.



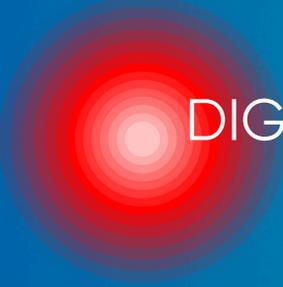
JOINT CONDITIONS (RHEUMATOLOGIC)



<p>RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS (RA)</p>	<p>An autoimmune disease that attacks the lining of joints.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint pain, swelling, and stiffness • Usually affects both sides of the body equally • Morning stiffness lasting more than 30 minutes • Commonly affects hands, wrists, feet, knees • Can cause fatigue and low-grade fever
<p>PSORIATIC ARTHRITIS (PsA)</p>	<p>Arthritis that occurs in some people with psoriasis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint pain and swelling • Swollen fingers or toes ("sausage digits") • Lower back pain • Nail changes • May affect any joint
<p>ANKYLOSING SPONDYLITIS (AS)</p>	<p>A type of arthritis that mainly affects the spine.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic back pain and stiffness • Pain often worse in the morning or after rest • Improves with movement and exercise • May cause spine to fuse over time • Can affect other joints, eyes, and organs
<p>LUPUS (SLE)</p>	<p>An autoimmune disease that can affect many body systems.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint pain and swelling • Butterfly-shaped rash on face • Fatigue, fever • Can affect kidneys, heart, lungs, brain

References:

1. Arthritis Foundation. "Types of Arthritis." arthritis.org.
2. Spondylitis Association of America. "About Spondylitis." spondylitis.org.



DIGESTIVE CONDITIONS (GI)



Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD) includes two main conditions:

CROHN'S DISEASE

Inflammation that can affect any part of the digestive tract.

- Most commonly affects the end of the small intestine and colon
- Inflammation can go deep into the intestinal wall
- May have "skip" areas (healthy sections between diseased areas)

Symptoms:

- Abdominal pain and cramping
- Diarrhea (sometimes bloody)
- Fatigue
- Weight loss and reduced appetite
- Fistulas (abnormal connections between organs)

ULCERATIVE COLITIS (UC)

Inflammation limited to the colon (large intestine) and rectum.

- Affects the innermost lining of the colon
- Continuous inflammation (no skip areas)
- Usually starts in the rectum and spreads upward

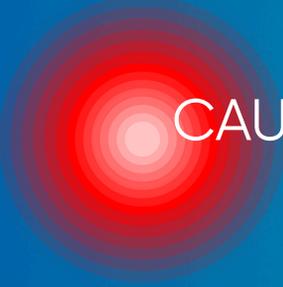
Symptoms:

- Bloody diarrhea
- Urgent need to have bowel movements
- Abdominal pain and cramping
- Rectal pain
- Fatigue

IBD vs. IBS: IBD (Inflammatory Bowel Disease) is NOT the same as IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome). IBD causes visible inflammation and damage; IBS does not.

References:

1. Crohn's & Colitis Foundation. "What is Crohn's Disease?" crohnscolitisfoundation.org.
2. Crohn's & Colitis Foundation. "What is Ulcerative Colitis?" crohnscolitisfoundation.org.



CAUSES AND RISK FACTORS



The exact cause of most inflammatory conditions is not fully understood. They likely result from a combination of factors:

Genetics

- Many inflammatory conditions run in families
- Certain genes increase risk
- Having a family member with one condition increases your risk

Immune System Dysfunction

- The immune system attacks healthy tissue by mistake
- Inflammation becomes chronic instead of resolving

Environmental Triggers

- Infections may trigger the immune response
- Stress can worsen symptoms
- Smoking increases risk for many conditions
- Diet may play a role in some conditions

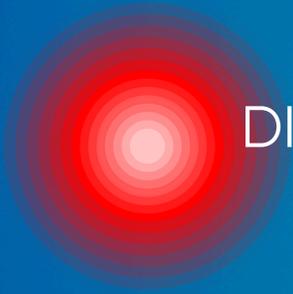
Risk Factors

- Family history of autoimmune or inflammatory disease
- Having one autoimmune condition (increases risk of others)
- Smoking
- Obesity
- Age (varies by condition)
- Sex (some conditions more common in women or men)

Important: These conditions are NOT contagious. You cannot catch them from someone else.

References:

1. National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases. NIAMS, NIH.
2. American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association. aarda.org.



How Are These Conditions Diagnosed?

Diagnosis depends on the type of condition and may include:

Physical Examination

Your doctor will examine affected areas and ask about your symptoms, family history, and how symptoms affect your daily life.

Blood Tests

- Inflammation markers (CRP, ESR)
- Autoimmune antibodies (RF, ANA, anti-CCP)
- Complete blood count

Imaging

- X-rays (joint damage)
- MRI (detailed view of joints, spine, soft tissue)
- Ultrasound (joint inflammation)
- CT scan (digestive tract)

Specialized Tests

For Skin Conditions:

- Skin biopsy

For Joint Conditions:

- Joint fluid analysis

For GI Conditions:

- Colonoscopy with biopsy
- Upper endoscopy
- Stool tests

References:

1. American College of Rheumatology. "Diagnostic Testing." rheumatology.org.



TREATMENT OPTIONS



Treatment goals are to reduce inflammation, relieve symptoms, prevent damage, and improve quality of life.

TOPICAL TREATMENTS (Skin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Corticosteroid creams and ointments• Calcineurin inhibitors (tacrolimus, pimecrolimus)• Vitamin D analogs• Moisturizers
ORAL MEDICATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NSAIDs (reduce pain and inflammation)• Corticosteroids (prednisone) - short-term use• DMARDs (methotrexate, sulfasalazine) - slow disease• JAK inhibitors (tofacitinib, upadacitinib)
BIOLOGIC MEDICATIONS	<p>Targeted therapies given by injection or infusion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• TNF inhibitors (Humira, Enbrel, Remicade, Cimzia, Simponi)• IL-17 inhibitors (Cosentyx, Taltz, Siliq)• IL-23 inhibitors (Skyrizi, Tremfya, Stelara)• IL-12/23 inhibitor (Stelara)• Integrin inhibitors (Entyvio) - for IBD

LIGHT THERAPY (Phototherapy)

UV light treatment for skin conditions like psoriasis.

References:

1. American College of Rheumatology. "Treatment Guidelines." rheumatology.org.
2. National Psoriasis Foundation. "Treatment Options." psoriasis.org.

Biologics are advanced medications made from living cells. They target specific parts of the immune system that cause inflammation.

How Biologics Work

Unlike older medications that affect the whole immune system, biologics block specific proteins (like TNF, IL-17, or IL-23) that drive inflammation.

How They're Given

- Self-injection at home (most common)
- Infusion at a clinic or hospital
- Frequency varies: weekly, every 2 weeks, monthly, or longer

Before Starting Biologics

Your doctor will check for:

- Tuberculosis (TB test required)
- Hepatitis B and C
- Current infections
- Vaccination status

Possible Side Effects

- Injection site reactions (redness, itching)
- Increased risk of infections
- Headache, fatigue
- Upper respiratory infections

Important Safety Information

- Tell your doctor if you develop any signs of infection
- Avoid live vaccines while on biologics
- Let all healthcare providers know you take a biologic

References:

1. American College of Rheumatology. "Biologic Medications." rheumatology.org.

A graphic consisting of several concentric red circles of varying sizes, creating a ripple effect, located in the top left corner of the page.

LIVING WITH AN INFLAMMATORY CONDITION

Many people with inflammatory conditions live full, active lives. Here's how to manage:

Know Your Triggers

- Stress can worsen symptoms
- Certain foods may trigger flares (varies by person)
- Lack of sleep can increase inflammation
- Keep a symptom diary to identify patterns

Lifestyle Tips

- Don't smoke - smoking worsens many conditions
- Exercise regularly (low-impact is often best)
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Get enough sleep
- Manage stress (meditation, yoga, deep breathing)

Diet Considerations

- Anti-inflammatory foods may help (fish, vegetables, fruits, whole grains)
- Limit processed foods and sugar
- For IBD, a dietitian can help identify trigger foods

Emotional Support

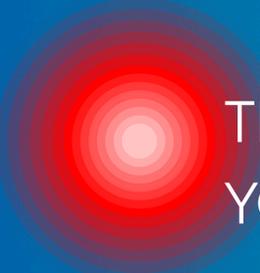
- It's normal to feel frustrated or sad
- Join a support group
- Talk to a counselor or therapist if needed
- Connect with others who understand

Work with Your Care Team

- Keep all appointments
- Be honest about symptoms and how you're feeling
- Ask questions

References:

1. Arthritis Foundation. "Living with Arthritis." arthritis.org.



TIPS FOR TAKING YOUR MEDICATION



- Take medications exactly as prescribed
- Store biologics properly (usually refrigerated)
- Let medication reach room temperature before injecting
- Rotate injection sites
- Keep all follow-up appointments
- Tell your doctor about ALL medications and supplements
- Get recommended vaccines before starting biologics

Injection Tips

- Ice the area beforehand to numb it
- Pinch the skin before injecting
- Inject slowly
- Use a sharps container for needles

If You Miss a Dose

- Take it as soon as you remember
- If it's almost time for the next dose, call your doctor
- Never double up



- Stop medication without talking to your doctor
- Skip doses
- Freeze biologics (unless specifically instructed)
- Use medication that looks cloudy, discolored, or has particles
- Get live vaccines while on biologics
- Ignore signs of infection



References:

1. American College of Rheumatology. "Taking Your Medication." rheumatology.org.



WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR

! CALL 911 OR GO TO THE EMERGENCY ROOM IF:

- Severe allergic reaction (trouble breathing, swelling of face/throat)
- High fever with chills
- Severe abdominal pain
- Blood in stool or vomit
- Chest pain
- Signs of serious infection

! CALL YOUR DOCTOR'S OFFICE IF:

- Signs of infection (fever, chills, cough, painful urination)
- Worsening symptoms or a flare
- New joint pain or swelling
- New or worsening skin symptoms
- Increased diarrhea or abdominal pain (IBD)
- Injection site reactions that don't improve
- Numbness or tingling
- Vision changes
- Mood changes or depression
- Side effects that concern you



Keep Your Follow-Up Appointments!

Regular monitoring helps catch problems early and adjust treatment as needed.

References:

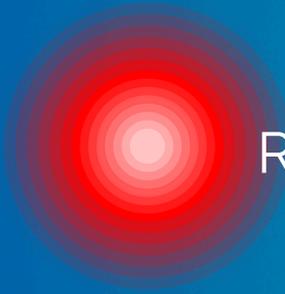
1. American College of Rheumatology. "When to Call Your Doctor." rheumatology.org.



GLOSSARY



AUTOIMMUNE	When the immune system attacks healthy cells
BIOLOGIC	Advanced medication made from living cells
CHRONIC	Long-lasting or recurring
DMARD	Disease-modifying antirheumatic drug
FLARE	Period when symptoms get worse
IBD	Inflammatory Bowel Disease (Crohn's and UC)
INFLAMMATION	Body's response causing redness, swelling, heat, pain
INFUSION	Medication given through an IV
NSAID	Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug
REMISSION	Period when symptoms are minimal or gone
RHEUMATOLOGIST	Doctor who specializes in joint and autoimmune diseases
TNF	Tumor necrosis factor - a protein that causes inflammation



RESOURCES



Learn More:

Skin Conditions:

- National Psoriasis Foundation: psoriasis.org
- National Eczema Association: nationaleczema.org
- HS Foundation: hs-foundation.org

Joint Conditions:

- Arthritis Foundation: arthritis.org
- American College of Rheumatology: rheumatology.org
- Spondylitis Association of America: spondylitis.org
- Lupus Foundation of America: lupus.org

Digestive Conditions:

- Crohn's & Colitis Foundation: crohnscolitisfoundation.org

General:

- American Autoimmune Related Diseases Association: aarda.org
- Mayo Clinic: mayoclinic.org



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