

Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA)

Information for young people



leeds children's
hospital

caring about children

Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA)

You probably thought that arthritis only happens to old people. It can be a shock to hear a doctor say that you have Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis! You probably have lots of questions. You may need to hear the answers several times.

That's OK!

Making a list of your questions is often a good way to start talking to your treatment team and your family.

This information leaflet will tell you a bit about Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis. What causes it? How is it treated? What does it mean for you?

What is JIA?

Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA) is arthritis that young people get.

- Juvenile means young people under the age of 16 years.
- Idiopathic means that other causes have been ruled out.
- Arthritis is when a joint swells up, is stiff - especially in the morning and hurts (gets inflamed).

What causes JIA?

Your body has an immune system which fights germs from outside the body to keep you healthy. Sometimes, the body's immune system makes a mistake and starts attacking the body itself. In JIA, the immune system attacks the joints. We don't know everything about how or why this happens.

- You didn't catch JIA from someone else (and you can't give JIA to another person).
- There is nothing that anyone did or didn't do that caused your JIA.

JIA can also affect the eyes (a condition known as UVEITIS).

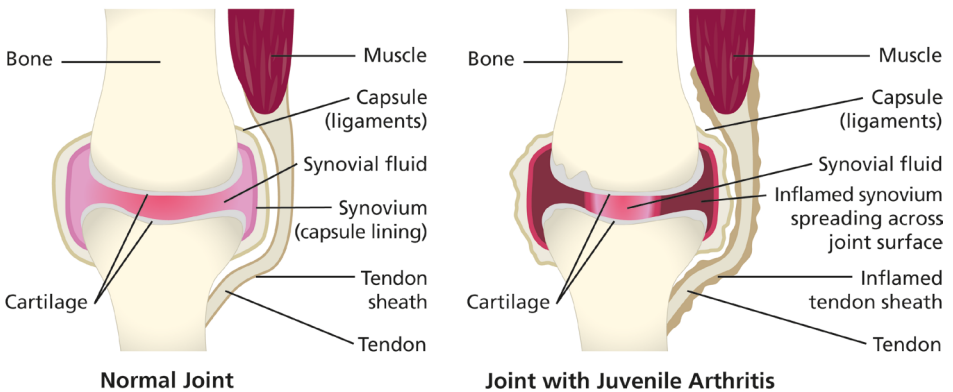
Uveitis is inflammation in part of the eye. As with arthritis, the inflammation is caused by the immune system mistakenly attacking the eye. Symptoms can include blurry vision or a blood-shot eye (with or without pain in the eye) but often, there are no symptoms in young children. Your doctor cannot tell if there is inflammation just by looking at the eye without specialised equipment so you will have to be seen regularly by an ophthalmologist (specialist eye doctor) to check if there is uveitis. If there is uveitis, it is treated with special eye drops or other medications.

What happens to the joints in JIA?

Your body has many joints; joints are where two bones are connected. The ends of the bones have a smooth covering called cartilage. A joint is in a kind of bag called a capsule. The inside of the bag has a special lining (synovial membrane) that makes a fluid. The fluid lets the bones move easily - like oil on a bicycle chain, it also protects the joint.

In JIA, the lining of the joint becomes inflamed and thicker than normal, the capsule fills up with inflammatory cells and the amount of synovial fluid increases. This is what makes joints swollen, stiff, hot and sore. If the inflammation is not treated, it can damage the joint, the cartilage and the surrounding bone. Muscles around the joint can also become weak and stiff.

JUVENILE ARTHRITIS



What is it like to live with JIA?

The tendency to have arthritis can last for months or years - it is impossible to say how long. With treatment, most young people with JIA will have no or only minor joint problems for most of the time. You may have times when you feel better, and then, times when you notice more symptoms and feel more tired, stiff or sore. This is called a 'flare'. Flares can sometimes be triggered by an infection but mostly seem to happen for no reason. If you have a flare, you might need to change treatments for a short time, until the JIA is back under control.

Just as your physical well-being can change over time, there may be times when you feel fed-up about having JIA or the effect it has on your life. It is important to talk about these feelings with your friends, family and treatment team so you can be supported and learn to live well with JIA.

How is JIA treated?

Your treatment is planned just for you - it may be different for another person. This is because JIA affects each young person differently.

The main ways of treating JIA include:

- medications to control inflammation;
- steroid joint injections to reduce inflammation, in particular joints;
- exercises to keep joints moving well and muscles strong; and
- pain management strategies to reduce pain and help you cope with pain.

Useful websites:

- **JIA@NRAS**
National Rheumatoid Arthritis Society
<http://www.nras.org.uk/jia>
- **PRINTO**
The website of the Paediatric European Rheumatology Society
<https://www.printo.it>
- **Versus Arthritis**
<http://versusarthritis.org>

Contact details

Leeds Paediatric Rheumatology Service

Please feel free to contact us on:
Tel: **0113 3920683** (answer phone)

Or e-mail us:
leedsth-tr.PRNurses@nhs.net



What did you think of your care? Visit bit.ly/nhsleedsfft
Your views matter

© The Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust • 2nd edition (Ver 1)
Developed by: Vanessa Van Rooyen, Rheumatology Nurse
Produced by: Medical Illustration Services
MID code: 20210607_016/IH

LN004034
Publication date
06/2022
Review date
06/2024