

Health Tips for Parents

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How can I help my child with arthritis?

Arthritis is a condition that affects people of all ages. Juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA), also known as juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (JRA), is the most common form of arthritis in children and adolescents.



JIA is persistent inflammation of joints



characterized by swelling, heat, and pain. The most prevalent form of JIA peaks between 2 and 3 years of age, explains

Miriam Parsa, pediatric rheumatologist, Mattel Children's Hospital, UCLA. In children who have a certain genetic predisposition to autoimmune disease, changes in the environment (if the child gets sick) may trigger the disease.

In JIA, the immune system attacks the synovium (a special tissue that lines the joints and provides nourishment and lubrication for the cartilage) and causes the joints to swell and get inflamed. If untreated, the inflammation can eat away at the cartilage and surrounding bone, and may affect bone growth.

There are many types of JIA, but the two most common are oligoarthritis, which causes stiffness and swelling in four or fewer joints, and polyarticular arthritis, which affects five or more joints.

Diagnosis and Treatment

An early and accurate diagnosis is key to effectively managing JIA. To diagnose JIA, the doctor will take a detailed medical history and conduct a thorough physical examination to look for joint swelling, eye problems, and rashes. The doctor may order X-rays or blood tests to rule out other conditions or infections.

For inflammation and pain, your child's doctor or pediatric rheumatologist may prescribe nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs like ibuprofen (such as Advil or Motrin) and recommend an appropriate physical therapy program.

Symptoms

JIA is never the same from one child to the next. Symptoms may come and go, or may be continuous. They may occur first in one joint, then involve other joints.

Some of the **most common symptoms of JIA** include:

- morning joint stiffness, improved with activity
- joint swelling
- limping (knees are the most commonly affected joints in JIA)
- excessive clumsiness
- difficulty writing or opening bottles because of joint pain



Maintain a healthy lifestyle

Once arthritis is controlled with medication, it is important to maintain a regular exercise program to help keep the muscles strong and healthy to support and protect joints and maintain range of motion, advises Dr. Parsa. Understanding the symptoms and characteristics of each type of JIA can help a person maintain an active, productive lifestyle.

This information is provided courtesy of the pediatricians at Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA. UCLA Health pediatricians are conveniently located in your neighborhood. In addition to our Children's Health Center in Westwood, we have offices in Brentwood, Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica and West Los Angeles. All health and health-related information contained in this publication is intended to be general in nature and should not be used as a substitute for a visit with a healthcare professional.