



Help FOR RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

The human body comes equipped with a complex, powerful defense mechanism designed to protect us from foreign invaders like bacteria and viruses. Although our immune system works constantly to keep us healthy, we tend to take it for granted, until something goes wrong. That is exactly what happens when someone has Rheumatoid Arthritis.

“If treated early, a patient can experience *symptom relief*, joint destruction can be slowed and early disability can perhaps be avoided.” — Rosemarie DeSantis, M.D.

Unlike osteoarthritis, which is a condition of wear and tear on the joints caused by aging or injury, rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease in which the body’s own immune system mistakenly attacks healthy tissue, causing inflammation that damages your joints.

“Rheumatoid arthritis can progress very quickly and cause permanent damage to the joints. This can result in chronic pain, loss of function of the joints and disability. The disease could affect your ability to do everyday activities like getting out of bed, dressing yourself, washing and walking,” said **Rosemarie DeSantis, M.D.**, a board-certified Rheumatologist on the medical staff of SOCH.



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“However, if treated early, a patient can experience symptom relief, joint destruction can be slowed and early disability can perhaps be avoided.”

Some medications only treat the pain, but not the disease progression. Dr. DeSantis offers her patients a treatment option with a drug called Remicade, that goes beyond pain relief and acts to stop the disease progression, and, in some cases, stop new joint damage before it starts.

“Remicade is given by IV infusion, which is a simple process that can be done right in the office setting,” explained Dr. DeSantis. “The drug

works by blocking the activity of TNF-alpha, one of the proteins in the body that leads to inflammation.”

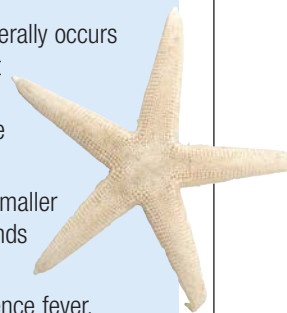
Dr. DeSantis cautions that Remicade is not for everyone with rheumatoid arthritis. Symptoms vary among people with the disease, therefore, an individualized approach to care will afford the best treatment for each patient.

An important first step, says Dr. DeSantis, is to have a proper diagnosis so that effective treatment can begin immediately. It is essential that people with joint pain differentiate between osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

According to Dr. DeSantis, people with rheumatoid arthritis experience pain or stiffness lasting for more than 30

The following are symptoms of rheumatoid arthritis:

1. Symmetrical swelling, for example, both hands or both feet.
2. Joint pain, swelling, tenderness and redness
3. Inflammation that generally occurs in the knuckles and at the joints closest to your hands, nearer the base of your fingers
4. Swelling and pain in smaller joints, such as the hands and ankles
5. Some patients experience fever, weight loss, fatigue and/or anemia



In contrast, osteoarthritis is characterized by:

1. Joint stiffness that tends to get worse throughout the day
2. Asymmetrical (not matching) swelling in individual joints that are not part of a pair, such as one knee and one elbow, instead of both knees
3. Inflammation that generally occurs at the joint closest to your fingernail
4. Pain and swelling in bigger joints such as the hips and knees

minutes in the morning or after long periods of rest or inactivity. Although the disease can strike at any age, it often begins in middle age and gets worse over time.

“People with rheumatoid arthritis don’t have to suffer with debilitating symptoms,” said Dr. DeSantis. “An improved quality of life is possible. If you suspect you have the disease, call your doctor today.”

For more information about *rheumatoid arthritis*, call **SOCHConnect** at 609-978-3400.