

understanding your medications

Rheumatoid Arthritis

Getting a diagnosis can be overwhelming, especially if you need complicated care. Along with good nutrition, taking your prescribed medication as directed is an important part of a successful treatment plan. The Meijer Specialty Pharmacy care team is here for you every step of the way. **Our pharmacists are available 24/7 to answer questions and to help you get the most out of your medication.**

Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) is a chronic, autoimmune condition. Autoimmune conditions happen when your immune system mistakenly attacks some of your own cells, causing damage. In RA, this attack starts in the lining of your joints, causing painful swelling, but can also happen in other parts of the body like the eyes, lungs, heart, blood vessels and skin. All of the medications used to treat RA work by either targeting the cells that are wrongly attacking your body or by decreasing the inflammation that happens after the attack.

Biologics

Biologic medications work by blocking specific immune system cells so they can't attack your joints. When these immune cells are blocked, there is less inflammation and you experience less symptoms. Below you will find some helpful facts and tips about the medications you might be taking.

Medication Name	How Med Is Given	Common Side Effects	Ways To Lessen Side Effects
Actemra® (tocilizumab)	Injected into the skin or injected into a vein through an IV infusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevated liver enzymes Pain or redness at the injection site Increased cholesterol Infection Anemia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick. Make sure to inject yourself in a different spot each time – don't inject into the same area over and over again. You may need to have a healthcare professional give you each dose of this medication. Make sure to follow all of the instructions that they give you to prepare for each dose. Make sure to keep all of your appointments for lab tests – these will check to make sure that the medication isn't causing any liver, blood or cholesterol problems.
Cimzia® (certolizumab)	Injected into the skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often, and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick.
Enbrel® (etanercept)	Injected into the skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diarrhea Infection Pain or redness at the injection site Sore throat Rash 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure to inject yourself in a different spot each time – don't inject into the same area over and over again. Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to help choose an over-the-counter pain reliever that's right for you.

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Humira® (adalimumab)	Injected into the skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Rash • Pain or redness at the injection site • Infection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure to inject yourself in a different spot each time – don't inject into the same area over and over again. • Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick. • Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to help choose an over-the-counter pain reliever that's right for you.
Kevzara® (sarilumab)	Injected into the skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elevated liver enzymes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure to keep all of your appointments for lab tests – these will check to make sure that the medication isn't causing any liver problems.
Kineret® (anakinra)	Injected into the skin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever • Headache • Infection • Pain or redness at the injection site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure to inject yourself in a different spot each time – don't inject into the same area over and over again. • Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick. • Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to help choose an over-the-counter pain reliever that's right for you.
Olumiant® (baricitinib)	Taken by mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick.
Orencia® (abatacept)	Injected into the skin or injected into a vein through an IV infusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headache • Infection • Sore throat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick. • Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to help choose an over-the-counter pain reliever that's right for you.
Remicade® Avsola™ Inflectra® Renflexis® (infliximab)	Injected into a vein through an IV infusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abdominal pain • Cough • Headache • Elevated liver enzymes • Heartburn • Infection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick. • You will need to have a healthcare professional give you each dose of this medication. Make sure to follow all of the instructions that they give you to prepare for each dose. • Make sure to keep all of your appointments for lab tests – these will check to make sure that the medication isn't causing any liver problems.
Rinvoq™ (upadacitinib)	Taken by mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infection • Nausea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often, and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick. • Try taking the medication with bland food

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Rituxan® (rituximab) Riabni™ Ruxience®	Injected into a vein through an IV infusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low white blood cells • Fever • Infection • Flu-like symptoms • Headache • Fatigue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick. • You will need to have a healthcare professional give you each dose of this medication. Make sure to follow all of the instructions that they give you to prepare for each dose. • Make sure to keep all of your appointments for lab tests – these will check to make sure that the medication isn't causing white blood cell problems.
Xeljanz® (tofacitinib)	Taken by mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infection • Sore throat • Rash • Headache 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick. • Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to help choose an over-the-counter pain reliever that's right for you.

Anti-Inflammatory Medications

These medications work by blocking the chemicals in the body that are released when the immune system attacks healthy cells in the body. These chemicals lead to the inflammation and swelling that cause damage to the joints in RA.

Medication Name	How Med Is Given	Common Side Effects	Ways To Lessen Side Effects
Imuran® Azathioprine (Imuran®, Azasan®)	Taken by mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low white blood cells • Infection • Nausea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick. • Make sure to keep all of your appointments for lab tests – these will check to make sure that the medication isn't causing white blood cell problems
Cyclosporine (Gengraf®, Neoral®, Sandimmune®)	Taken by mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High blood pressure • Headache • Infection • Nausea • High cholesterol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to avoid eating foods that are high in salt (see <i>Reading a Food Label</i> in the Tools & Resources section). • Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick. • Eating small, frequent meals throughout the day can help limit nausea. • Make sure to keep all of your appointments for lab tests – these will check to make sure that the medication isn't causing cholesterol problems.
D-Penicillamine (Cuprimine®, Depen®)	Taken by mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vomiting • Nausea • Diarrhea • Changes in taste 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating small, frequent meals throughout the day can help limit nausea and stomach upset.

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Medication Name	How Med Is Given	Common Side Effects	Ways To Lessen Side Effects
Hydroxychloroquine (Plaquenil®)	Taken by mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevated liver enzymes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure to keep all of your appointments for lab tests – these will check to make sure that the medication isn't causing liver problems.
Leflunomide (Arava®)	Taken by mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevated liver enzymes Diarrhea Nausea Infection Headache Rash Hair loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure to keep all of your appointments for lab tests – these will check to make sure that the medication isn't causing liver problems. Practice good hygiene: make sure to wash your hands often and stay away from others who are sick. Make sure to see your doctor right away if you think you might be sick. Eating small, frequent meals throughout the day can help limit nausea. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to help choose an over-the-counter pain reliever that's right for you.
Methotrexate (Rasuvo®, Trexall®, Otrexup®)	Taken by mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elevated liver enzymes Low platelets Nausea Diarrhea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure to keep all of your appointments for lab tests – these will check to make sure that the medication isn't causing liver or blood problems. Eating small, frequent meals throughout the day can help limit nausea and stomach upset.
Minocycline (Minocin®)	Taken by mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nausea Vomiting Headache Fatigue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eating a variety of healthy foods will help you get all of the vitamins and minerals that you need to feel your best. Eating small, frequent meals throughout the day can help limit nausea and stomach upset. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist to help choose an over-the-counter pain reliever that's right for you.
Prednisone/ Prednisolone Methyl-prednisolone	By mouth or injected into the vein through an IV infusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Irritability Weight gain High blood sugar High blood pressure High cholesterol Insomnia Low bone density 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eating a variety of healthy foods will help you get all of the vitamins and minerals that you need to feel your best. Try to avoid eating foods that are very sugary or very salty (see <i>Reading a Food Label</i> in the Tools & Resources section). Include calcium and vitamin D food sources. Practice good sleep habits (see our sleep section for more information).
Sulfasalazine (Azulfidine®)	Taken by mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nausea Vomiting Headache Weight loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use an over-the-counter (OTC) pain reliever. Make sure to check with your doctor or pharmacist to see which OTC pain reliever is right for you. Eating a variety of healthy foods will help you get all of the vitamins and minerals that you need to feel your best. Eating small, frequent meals throughout the day can help limit nausea. Avoiding fried or greasy foods can limit nausea and vomiting.