

A large iceberg floating in the ocean. The tip of the iceberg, which is visible above the water surface, is jagged and white. The much larger part of the iceberg is submerged below the water surface, appearing as a dark blue mass. This visual metaphor represents the concept of disease activity being both visible and hidden.

Understanding Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA) Disease Activity... ABOVE and BELOW the Surface

A Planning Guide to Help Optimize Disease Management for RA

The information contained in this educational resource is intended to reinforce and supplement information you receive from your healthcare team. It is not a substitute for medical advice from your physician. If you have questions about the information you read in this educational resource, please discuss them with your healthcare provider.

This has been produced as a patient education resource by Pfizer Inc.

How to Use This Planning Guide

The Iceberg



It's a commonly used image that can explain any situation in which something is seen, yet something more is unseen—at the same time.¹

The iceberg is also a useful metaphor to explain what's happening inside your body when you're living with RA. That's because the signs and symptoms of RA—pain, swelling, or joint tenderness—are just the "tip of the RA iceberg"; chronic inflammation may still be occurring below the surface.²

You often don't recognize that inflammation is always present and active in your body when you have RA.² For this reason, it's essential to take your RA medication exactly as prescribed by your doctor.

That's just one important "tip from the RA iceberg" that you'll find in this brochure.

This useful tool contains information to help support disease management. Use this guide to better understand RA and how it affects *you*.

What You Will Learn

Important things you may not know—but *should know*—about RA

- 1 Better **explain RA—a chronic autoimmune inflammatory disease**—to family and friends who don't understand your medical condition
- 2 Explain why **RA is more than just the symptoms** of pain, stiffness, and tender and swollen joints
- 3 Describe the role of **different classes of medication** used to manage RA
- 4 Understand how your doctor **can tell if your underlying inflammation is being managed** with your disease management plan
- 5 Describe the **potential effect that joint damage** caused by RA can have on your ability to do **normal, everyday activities of daily living**
- 6 Explain why **improvement in the signs and symptoms of RA doesn't necessarily mean that the underlying inflammation process that can lead to joint damage** is reduced
- 7 Describe the **potential consequences of stopping your medication**, reducing your dose, or taking your medication less frequently than directed by your doctor without first talking to your doctor



A Tip From the RA Iceberg

Even when your RA symptoms appear to be absent or have subsided, it's essential to regularly take your medication as prescribed by your doctor. Only through a physical examination and the use of diagnostic imaging and tests can your doctor see the underlying inflammation caused by RA. Therefore, do not discontinue your medication without first speaking with your doctor.

Need-to-Know Information About RA

1 RA is a chronic autoimmune inflammatory disease. The terms are defined as:

- **Chronic** means you'll have RA for your entire lifetime.³ Today, there's no known cure for RA.⁴ However, medications may help control the joint damage and bone loss that may occur.³
- **Autoimmune** diseases are conditions in which your immune system attacks healthy cells by mistake.⁵ In RA, your immune system attacks and destroys healthy joint tissue, which may lead to conditions affecting other parts of the body.
- **Inflammatory** disease refers to a process that can lead to joint damage.³ As RA progresses, inflammation can destroy cartilage and bone in joints, leading to pain and damage. Over time, the joints can become weak and unable to function normally.² This may limit your ability to perform simple, everyday activities.³

2 RA is more than just the symptoms of pain, stiffness, and tender and swollen joints.



Patients with RA often seek help from their doctor because of the pain, stiffness, fatigue, or swollen and tender joints they experience.² These are some of the symptoms of RA—the things that patients can see and feel. However, underneath these symptoms is an active inflammatory process that, if unmanaged or undermanaged, can lead to joint damage, bone loss, and other medical conditions.²



A Tip From the RA Iceberg

Understanding RA and how it affects your body is essential to working with your doctor to identify an appropriate disease management plan for you.

3 Patients with a diagnosis of RA may be prescribed a DMARD and other types of medications.

DMARD (pronounced DEE-MARD) stands for **D**isease-**M**odifying **A**nti**R**heumatic **D**rug. DMARDs are a class of medications used to help manage the underlying inflammation caused by RA.⁶ Other medications for RA include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and corticosteroids.³ RA can damage joints, leading to pain and loss of function.

4 Doctors, specifically rheumatologists who are trained to treat RA, are able to tell if your RA is under control.

Your doctor knows whether your RA is under control by doing a physical examination—as well as evaluating your past medical history and how long you have had RA.² Your doctor may also use X-rays, ultrasound machines, and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to obtain images of your joints to show the extent of bone erosion or joint damage.^{2,4,6} Certain lab tests may also be ordered by your doctor to see if your RA is under control.²

5 Left untreated, or undertreated, RA can progress and affect your ability to perform simple activities of daily life that many people take for granted.

To help understand how RA is affecting your life, your doctor may ask questions regarding whether you have any difficulty performing daily functions.⁷ All of these questions show how RA can possibly affect your daily activities if it is not treated early or effectively.⁴

Need-to-Know Information About RA, continued

6 The goal of a disease management plan is to manage symptoms and control inflammation.

Like the iceberg, the same is true with RA...only the surface above the water can be seen, but not what is underneath. Improvements in the symptoms you can see and feel—such as pain, swollen and tender joints, or stiffness—are like the surface of the iceberg. The underlying inflammation in RA is what you can’t see.³ Improvements in your symptoms do not necessarily mean that the underlying inflammation caused by your RA is under control. Information from your physical exam, lab tests, and imaging studies will tell your doctor if your underlying inflammation is being managed adequately.^{2,6}

7 Patients with RA are at an increased risk of developing other medical conditions.



The inflammation caused by RA can affect more than just the joints. In addition to the joint damage that may create difficulty in performing daily functions, patients with RA are also at possible risk for experiencing interstitial lung disease (inflammation or scarring of the lungs), increased risk of cardiac disease, and dry eye disease.⁸⁻¹⁰ It’s very important to follow the advice of your doctor, take your prescribed medications as directed, keep taking your medication even if your symptoms improve, and go to all scheduled appointments with your doctor.



A Tip From the RA Iceberg

You should always keep your doctor informed about how RA is impacting your daily activities. Only by openly discussing lifestyle challenges can your doctor take steps that may help you.



Now that you know the key facts about RA, check your understanding by answering the following questions:

1. RA is an autoimmune condition. What does this mean? (Circle the right answer)

 - A. RA is short-lived and eventually goes away
 - B. You can automatically get better when you take medication
 - C. RA is a condition in which your immune system attacks healthy cells, instead of attacking cells that can cause disease²
5. RA is a progressive condition. What does this mean? (Circle the right answer)

 - A. RA occurs as a natural part of aging
 - B. RA will get progressively better over time
 - C. RA symptoms may get worse if not managed²

Say it in your own words...What does it mean to have a chronic autoimmune inflammatory condition?

Say it in your own words...Explain the importance of taking your RA medication following your doctor’s disease management program.

2. What are the common signs and symptoms of RA? (Circle the right answer)

 - A. Cough, runny nose, headache
 - B. Swelling and tenderness of joints, stiffness, pain, feeling of extreme tiredness (fatigue)³
 - C. Shortness of breath, tightness in the chest, wheezing
6. RA disease activity is more than the signs and symptoms you can see and feel. What does this mean? (Circle the right answer)

 - A. RA is a disease that attacks joint tissues, which can result in permanent joint damage⁴
 - B. RA only affects the outer layer of skin
 - C. RA often changes a person’s facial appearance

Say it in your own words...What can happen if the inflammation caused by RA goes untreated?

Say it in your own words...When thinking about the iceberg, explain how it relates to your RA and disease management program.

3. DMARDs play an important role in managing RA. What does this mean? (Circle the right answer)

 - A. DMARDs cause the visible signs and symptoms associated with RA
 - B. DMARDs are used to help reduce the underlying inflammation associated with RA⁶
 - C. DMARDs are not an option for patients with RA
7. RA is known to be associated with other medical conditions. What does this mean? (Circle the right answer)

 - A. You must have other medical problems before you start experiencing RA
 - B. RA can only be managed when your other medical conditions are under control
 - C. With RA, you may be at risk of developing other conditions that may affect the bones, heart, and, lungs^{3,8,9}

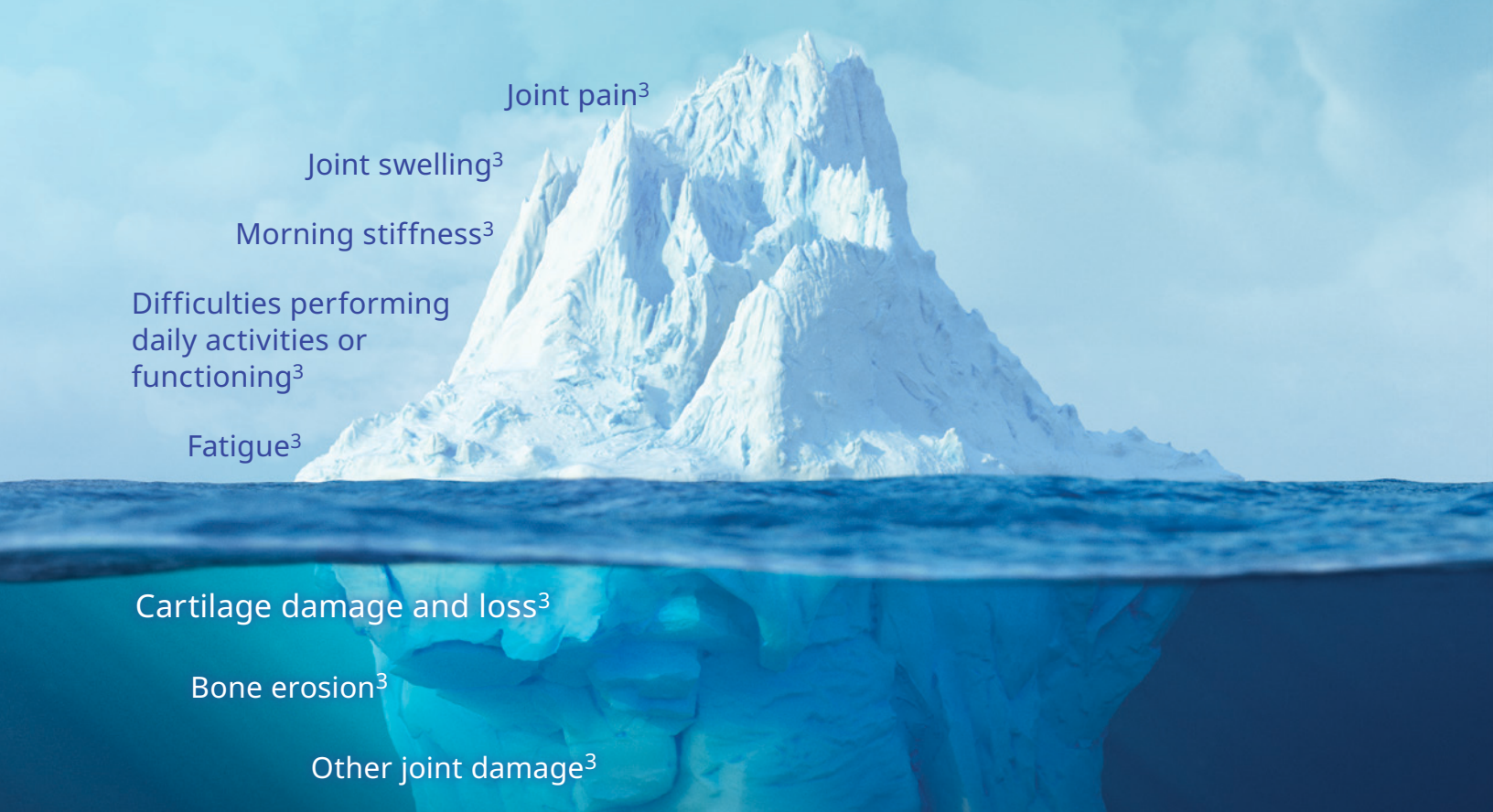
Say it in your own words...As a medication, what makes a DMARD unique?

Say it in your own words...What can happen if you stop taking your RA medication even when your symptoms of pain, swelling, and stiffness improve?

4. RA disease activity is assessed by a combination of physical exam, daily functioning, symptoms, blood work, and imaging tests to help your doctor monitor underlying inflammation. What does this mean? (Circle the right answer)

 - A. Your doctor will examine your throat and tonsils to see if they have reddened
 - B. Your doctor may order diagnostic tests—like bloodwork and imaging—to look at disease activity occurring underneath the skin⁴
 - C. Your doctor will see if you have a high temperature

Say it in your own words...How does your doctor find out whether your inflammation is under control?



Preparing for Your Next Appointment With Your Rheumatologist

Your next appointment:

Doctor:

Date:

Arrival Time:

Location:



List the questions, issues, or concerns you would like to speak to your doctor about during your next appointment:

Answer key to questions (Need-to-Know Information About RA):

[1. C] [2. B] [3. B] [4. B] [5. C] [6. A] [7. C]

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