

Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis Information Sheet

Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis (JRA) is the most common type of arthritis in children under the age of 16. It causes redness, swelling and soreness in joints. JRA can affect any joint and inflammation may limit the mobility of affected joints.

JRA is different in each child. Typically, there are periods when symptoms of JRA disappear (remission) and times when symptoms are worse (flare-ups). Some children may experience symptoms for only a few months, while others have symptoms for the rest of their lives.

Symptoms

Symptoms vary among individuals, but may include swollen, stiff and painful joints; limited movement; high fever and rash; eye inflammation and decreased appetite.

Treatment

Treatment focuses on controlling pain, improving function and preventing joint damage. It may include:

- Medication to relieve symptoms and slow progress of the disease
- Physical therapy to improve and maintain muscle and joint function
- Occupational therapy to improve ability to perform activities of daily living
- Nutritional guidance to ensure adequate nutritional intake
- Patient education to help decrease the frequency and severity of flare-ups and prevent complications

Educational Implications

The student's mobility, strength and endurance may be affected.

There may be irregular absences, since JRA can go from symptom-free periods to flares of swelling and pain very quickly.

If the student's hands are affected, writing may be difficult.

JRA can make it difficult to participate in social and after-school activities and make schoolwork more difficult.

Educational Options

Those students whose JRA adversely affects their educational performance may benefit from special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). To qualify under IDEA, a student must meet eligibility criteria in one of thirteen specific disability categories.

Under IDEA, a student with a disability is entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and an individualized education program, including individual goals, objectives, related services, accommodations and modifications.

Students that do not qualify for services under IDEA may qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. To qualify under Section 504, a student must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (for example learning, breathing, thinking, concentrating, walking, bodily functions). Under Section 504, a student is entitled to equal opportunity, and may qualify for a Section 504 plan that provides regular or special education and related aids and services.

A student with a health condition who does not require special instruction and related services can receive, as appropriate, a wide range of supports in the general education classroom, including accommodations, individualized health plans (IHP), emergency care plans (ECP) and local education agency supports.