

Self-Management Programs

for rheumatoid arthritis (RA)

What are self-management programs

Self-management programs help people with RA take an active role in managing their symptoms. They are used together with your regular medical care.

- Understanding RA and treatment options
- Staying active and protecting joints
- Managing pain, stress, and fatigue
- Setting goals and solving problems
- Tracking symptoms and knowing when to seek care
- Getting support from others

Do they work?

- May improve physical function, general health, and confidence to manage your health
- May help reduce disease activity
- Effects on pain, anxiety, and depression are less clear
- Benefits may be moderate for some people
- Safe and unlikely to cause harm

Who might benefit most?

Programs may work better when tailored to your needs.

- Cost, travel, or access to care
- Language or understanding health information
- Culture, beliefs, or past experiences with healthcare
- Where you live (e.g., rural or remote areas)
- Daily responsibilities (work, caregiving)

How certain is the evidence?

- Evidence is low to moderate certainty
- Some studies were small or had unclear methods
- Studies included mostly middle-aged to older women
- Results varied across studies
- More research is needed

How can you make it work for you?

- Choose programs that fit your life (in-person, online, or by phone)
- Look for free or low-cost options
- Ask for clear explanations
- Bring a family member or friend
- Start with one or two small changes
- Set realistic goals
- Go at your own pace
- Adjust activities during flare-ups or fatigue

What we don't know yet

- Who benefits the most
- How to improve access for everyone
- Whether programs reduce health differences between groups

Bottom line

Self-management programs for RA can help improve daily function, confidence, and overall health. They are safe and recommended as part of care, especially when tailored to your needs.

Self-management programs are not a replacement for medications or medical care. They work best combined with your usual treatment.