

EXCITING ADVANCES IN RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS CARE

Rheumatologist Joins Holland Hospital Medical Team

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic and potentially disabling condition that affects about 1.5 million U.S. adults. It causes painful joint swelling, stiffness and loss of movement. Untreated, RA can lead to permanent joint damage and complications of the lungs, eyes and coronary arteries.

Fortunately, RA treatment has come a long way in the past 10 to 15 years. “New therapies don’t just treat symptoms,” says Harry Staley, MD, a board-certified rheumatologist who recently joined Holland Hospital’s medical staff. “If started early enough, they actually cause remission—or at least keep disease activity very low.”

Dr. Staley has more than 35 years of experience treating arthritis and autoimmune disorders. He is accepting new patients at his practice, Lakeshore Health Partners–Rheumatology, in Holland.

Explaining RA

Rheumatoid arthritis occurs when the body’s immune system, which normally destroys bacteria

and other harmful substances, attacks healthy cells. It’s unclear why this happens. Genes appear to play a role, as do environmental triggers like smoking or infection with viruses such as the Epstein-Barr virus. RA is more common in women and usually appears around midlife.

Arthritis 101
Hear Dr. Staley’s talk at the Arthritis Foundation’s Speaker Series held at Holland Hospital. Visit [youtube.com/hollandhospital](https://www.youtube.com/hollandhospital).

Because the exact cause of RA is unknown, it’s difficult to take steps to avoid the disease. “I do think a time will come when we can prevent it,” Dr. Staley says. “In the meantime, there are things you can do to minimize your risk, like quitting smoking and maintaining a healthy weight and lifestyle.”

RA can attack any joint, but most commonly affects the hands and feet. Pain and swelling are usually symmetrical. This means they’re present in the same joint on both sides of the body. RA can also cause fatigue and slight fever.

If you notice RA symptoms, don’t delay—seek treatment early. “See a doctor if you have persistent pain and swelling in two or more joints that lasts six weeks or more,” Dr. Staley says.

Diagnosis and Treatment

Blood tests can detect the presence of RA-related proteins or antibodies—information that

Harry Staley, MD

**Lakeshore Health Partners–
Rheumatology**

577 Michigan Ave., Suite 203
Holland, MI 49423

(616) 393-5336

lakeshorehealthpartners.com



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can be crucial for effective treatment planning. “We customize therapy for each person,” Dr. Staley says. “For example, research shows that patients with certain antibodies might benefit from higher doses of medication.”

Treatment often starts with disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs). “These are oral medications, and they’re very effective if begun within six to 12 weeks of the first symptoms,” Dr. Staley says.

If DMARDs alone don’t work, your doctor may also prescribe biologics, a type of injectable medicine. “They’re made from actual body substances, which means they can target the inflammation, or swelling, in a very specific way,” Dr. Staley says.

It often takes time to find the best drugs for each patient. But once the right dosages are found, results can be dramatic. “If started early enough, the new therapies are very effective in about 60 to 80 percent of patients,” Dr. Staley says.



Test Your Arthritis Knowledge

Take our online arthritis quiz to test your smarts and learn key facts about the illness. Visit hollandhospital.org and click “Health Library” (at top right). Search for “Arthritis Quiz.”

