

RA AND HEART DISEASE

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What is heart disease?

Heart disease is when a thick plaque of fat and cholesterol is laid down in arteries that carry vital blood supplies to the heart muscle. Over time, big plaques can narrow the arteries and make it harder for blood to get to where it's needed. If it stops altogether, a heart attack can result. Heart disease is responsible for 74,000 deaths a year in the UK – and Glasgow has one of the highest rates of heart disease in the western world.

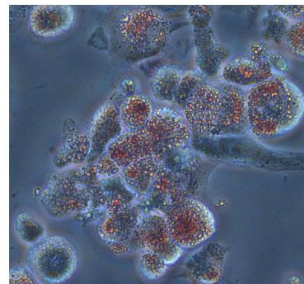
Heart disease is more common in people with rheumatoid arthritis (RA), and they are more likely to die from a heart attack than the rest of the population. But why is this, and what can we do about it?

Why do patients with RA get heart disease?

There may be several reasons:

- Inflammation itself increases heart disease
- RA patients are more likely to have other conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure
- RA patients are more likely to be overweight and not exercise enough
- Some medicines might also make heart disease more likely

RA affects more than just the joints!



Immune cells filled with cholesterol drops (red spots)

What about smoking?

Smoking greatly increases the risk of heart disease.

Did you know smoking is also bad for arthritis?

Smoking makes:

- you more likely to get RA
- RA worse with more damage
- RA harder to treat

Stopping smoking is one of the best things someone with RA can do for their health!

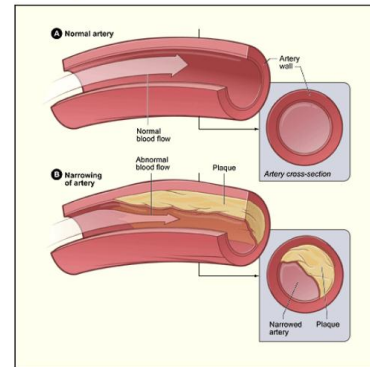
Even better: - never start smoking!

How can we protect patients from heart disease?

Doctors and nurses will:

- Treat inflammation in RA with powerful drugs
- Test for and treat blood pressure and high cholesterol
- Tell patients to stop smoking and exercise more

All of these are good for the joints and the heart!



Future research

Researchers in Glasgow are working with others in the UK to better understand heart disease, predict who is at risk of a heart attack and find out what treatments are best for each patient.

These studies are difficult though, and need lots of patients so that we can answer these questions.

In the lab, scientists are looking closely at the immune cells to see how they cause heart disease and how this can be prevented..

CONCLUSION

RA makes patients about 50% more likely to suffer a heart attack.

Treating arthritis effectively helps to reduce this risk.

Research in both in the lab and in the clinic will help understand and prevent this.