



Specialty Pharmacy

# Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis Wellness Guide

**Walmart** 

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## Introduction

Whether you're actively managing a condition or just looking for information, Walmart Specialty Pharmacy is here to support you every step of the way. We're also here to make it easy to get your prescriptions, stay on track with your medication refills, and answer any other questions you may have.

We understand that treatment involves more than just medication. So, we're here to help you understand the lifestyle changes that may make managing your condition easier on a daily basis.

It is always recommended that you talk with your doctor about any changes to treatment plans.

Remember, your health conditions do not define you! It's okay to ask for help.

## What is juvenile idiopathic arthritis?

Juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) is a condition affecting the immune system. It's the most common source of arthritis for kids and teenagers, affecting about 1 in every 10,000 American children.<sup>1</sup> People who have JIA often experience inflammation and pain in their joints. It can affect any body part, but most often appears in the hands, knees, elbows, wrists, or ankles.<sup>2</sup>

Because it's an autoimmune or autoinflammatory disease, JIA causes the body's immune system to attack its own cells. This leads to inflammation in the tissue around the joints, which can appear swollen and red and feel tender, painful, or difficult to move. JIA may last a few months, or a few years, or a lifetime.<sup>2,3</sup>

Here's what you should know about juvenile idiopathic arthritis.

## What causes juvenile idiopathic arthritis?

Juvenile idiopathic arthritis is an autoimmune or autoinflammatory disease that affects children and adolescents under the age of 16. It affects all races and ethnic backgrounds equally. Some types affect different genders equally, while other types are more prevalent in certain genders.<sup>2,3</sup>

The exact cause of juvenile idiopathic arthritis is unknown. Some researchers believe that a person's genetic background is a factor. Although the condition does not appear to run in families, children with a family history of long-lasting arthritis are at a slightly higher level of risk.<sup>2</sup> Foods, toxins, allergies, or vitamin deficiencies are not believed to be a factor in the onset of JIA.<sup>2</sup>

Once called juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (JRA), the current name of juvenile idiopathic arthritis reflects the understanding that it is not simply a version of RA for kids.<sup>2</sup>

## What are the symptoms, types & long-term effects of juvenile idiopathic arthritis?

Common symptoms of juvenile idiopathic arthritis include:<sup>1,2</sup>

- Stiffness, limping, or pain in the joints
- Red, swollen, tender, or warm joints
- Fatigue and low energy levels
- High fever
- Rash

- Dry eyes or blurred vision
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty with basic motor functions

The specific symptoms each person experiences will be specific to the type of arthritis that they're diagnosed with. Some children start with one type of juvenile idiopathic arthritis and then develop symptoms of a different kind at a later age.<sup>2</sup>

Symptoms usually don't appear consistently but come and go in cycles. Some kids will have one or two flare-ups, while others will have chronic symptoms that may never go away.<sup>4</sup> Periods of remission are followed by flare-ups that can last for days, weeks, or even months. Pain or stiffness may also worsen after waking up from sleep or staying in the same position for a long time.<sup>2</sup>

There are six types of juvenile idiopathic arthritis:

**Oligoarthritis juvenile idiopathic arthritis** is the most common type. It affects four joints or fewer-usually large ones like the knees, elbows, or ankles.<sup>2</sup> It also affects girls at higher rates than boys.<sup>1</sup>

**Polyarthritis JIA** affects about 1 in 4 kids diagnosed with JIA. It affects five or more joints, both large and small, and usually on both corresponding sides of the body (for example, both the right and left knee or both the right and left wrist).<sup>2</sup>

**Systemic onset JIA** affects about 1 in 10 kids with juvenile idiopathic arthritis. It affects joints all around the body, including skin and internal organs. It can also cause anemia, rash, and high fever lasting two or more weeks.<sup>1,2</sup>

**Psoriatic arthritis (PsA)** affects one or more joints, usually the wrists, knees, ankles, fingers, or toes. It also causes a scaly rash to appear on the ears, eyelids, elbows, knees, belly button, or scalp.<sup>2</sup>

**Enthesitis-related arthritis**, also known as spondyloarthritis, is most common in boys and usually appears between the ages of 8 to 15. It affects the area where muscles, ligaments, or tendons attach to the bone, usually in the hips, knees, and feet, but sometimes also the fingers, elbows, chest, lower back, pelvis, or digestive tract.<sup>2</sup>

**Undifferentiated juvenile idiopathic arthritis** affects one or more joints but in a way that doesn't exactly match up with the more common types of JIA listed above.<sup>2</sup>

No matter which type of juvenile idiopathic arthritis is diagnosed, the condition can have negative health effects if left untreated. Long-term neglect of symptoms can damage bones and cartilage (the lining covering the ends of bones in a joint). Other long-term health effects can include:<sup>2</sup>

- Heart damage
- Bone underdevelopment or thinning (osteoporosis)
- Long-term digestive tract damage causing chronic abdominal pain or diarrhea
- Lung inflammation and scarring, which can lead to difficulty breathing and even lung disease
- Neck pain or stiffness related to inflammation of the cervical spine or swollen neck glands
- Foot pain and difficulty walking
- Skin rashes
- Eye dryness, redness, sensitivity, or chronic inflammation
- Reproductive growth challenges and late onset of puberty
- Fluctuations in weight

As with the main symptoms of JIA, these long-term health effects may be offset or prevented altogether with proper medical diagnosis and treatment.<sup>2</sup>



## What can you do to treat juvenile idiopathic arthritis?

Although there is no established cure for juvenile idiopathic arthritis, proper diagnosis and treatment can help manage the symptoms and:<sup>2</sup>

- Create more periods of remission (with minimal or no symptoms)
- Control pain and stop or slow down inflammation
- Help to prevent negative long-term health effects or organ damage
- Prevent joint damage and preserve mobility

Diagnosis usually follows when a child or adolescent aged 16 years or younger experiences inflammation in one or more joints that lasts six weeks or more. A medical history, physical examination and blood tests are used to help ensure a correct diagnosis. Tests for liver or kidney function may also be ordered. Diagnosis usually comes from a pediatrician but may also be from a rheumatologist.<sup>2,5</sup>

After diagnosis, the specific treatment plan will depend on the type of JIA and the severity of the symptoms. For most cases, early and aggressive treatment will be recommended to get the condition under control as quickly as possible.<sup>2</sup>

Treatment typically includes a combination of:



**Medication** to better control inflammation and flare-ups. These include disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs), which suppress the immune system to relieve symptoms, and biologics, which target the inflammatory process.<sup>2</sup> In cases where few joints are affected, steroids may be used, either orally or by injection.<sup>1</sup>

Some drugs are designed to relieve pain, but do not work to reduce joint damage or change the course of the disease. These include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and analgesics (pain relievers).<sup>2</sup>



**Physical therapy & exercise** are often recommended to help relieve pain and stiffness, especially low-impact exercise like walking, swimming, and biking. Learning how to stay active at an early age can also help reduce the chance of mobility issues later in life. It's also an excellent chance to develop better motor skills and balance, which JIA can otherwise compromise. Children and adolescents can typically engage in any regular activity or sport when the condition is well managed.<sup>2</sup>



**Surgery** is usually not needed but can provide relief and restore functionality in some severe cases. Hip and knee replacements are the most common, but other surgeries can also improve joint function and quality of life.<sup>2</sup>



**Vitamins & supplements** may be able to help ease pain and stiffness, as well as strengthen bones, joints, and the immune system. Some may cause side effects, though—talk to your physician before selecting and using any supplements.<sup>2</sup> When you do have a recommendation, you can find many vitamins and supplements at Walmart.



**Topical creams & ointments** may be able to help ease pain and improve conditions related to skin or comfort. Ointments may also be an alternative for children who cannot take pills.<sup>2</sup> You can find a variety of over-the-counter creams, lotions, ointments and more at Walmart.



**Hot & cold treatments** like heat pads or warm baths can help numb pain, soothe symptoms, and improve comfort.<sup>2</sup>



**Lifestyle changes** can help reduce flare-ups and help prevent the health effects from getting worse over time. For children, lifestyle changes require the help of a guardian. However, it can also provide the foundation for a healthier lifestyle.



**A healthy diet** helps the body keep its strength while boosting bone and joint health, as well as the immune system. There isn't a specific diet for JIA in this regard, but healthy foods like fish, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains are believed to help curb particular symptoms. Walmart grocery offers many healthy food choices, available for pickup or delivery in some areas.



**Guard against infection** since juvenile idiopathic arthritis is an autoimmune disorder. Make sure you're up to date on your immunizations and vaccines. Wash your hands frequently and avoid close contact with people who may be sick.



**Network with other families** to give kids affected with JIA a valuable chance to interact with others who also have arthritis. Talk to your rheumatologist, pediatrician, or care team about whether your area has summer camps, sports leagues, or other group activities for kids affected with JIA.<sup>1</sup>



**Focus on mental health** since any chronic condition presents a serious challenge to anyone's physical, mental, and emotional health—especially with children and adolescents.

## Resources & references

- The **Arthritis Foundation** is the nation's leading source of information on JIA, offering a wealth of resources for parents, kids and caregivers, including the chance to connect with other families or community groups: <https://www.arthritis.org/juvenile-arthritis>
- The **JA Connect group finder** from the Arthritis Foundation can help you find a support group that's close to you: <https://connectgroups.arthritis.org/>
- The **JA Families service** from the Arthritis Foundation offers the chance for families to get resources and access to expertise about raising a child with juvenile arthritis: <https://www.arthritis.org/juvenile-arthritis/a-welcoming-home-for-ja-families>
- **Medline Plus** from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) offers a library of helpful resources and information to help you understand and cope with JIA, including a specific guide for teenagers and a tool to find local specialists: <https://medlineplus.gov/juvenilearthritis.html>
- **Cincinnati's Children's Hospital** has one of the Internet's best, most comprehensive FAQs about juvenile idiopathic arthritis: <https://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/health/j/jia>
- **Family Resources to Support Kids with Juvenile Arthritis** from the non-profit CoachArt organization includes helpful information, inspirational art and articles, recommended exercises and physical therapy tips, and more: <https://coachart.org/blog/family-resources-to-support-kids-with-juvenile-arthritis/>

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4. MedlinePlus, a service of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). "Juvenile Arthritis." MedlinePlus.gov, 26 Oct 2021: <https://medlineplus.gov/juvenilearthritis.html>
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**<https://www.walmart.com/aispoc>**

