

Juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA)

Juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) is a chronic autoimmune disease that causes joint inflammation in children and adolescents under age 16. Like adults, children can develop arthritis. The most common type of chronic, or long-lasting, arthritis that affects children is JIA.

JIA broadly refers to several different chronic disorders involving inflammation of joints (arthritis), which can cause joint pain, swelling, warmth, stiffness, and loss of motion. The various forms of JIA have different features, such as the pattern of joints involved and inflammation of other parts of the body besides the joints. Depending on the type of JIA, other parts of the body may also be affected, such as the eyes, skin, heart, lungs, and intestines. For example, some patients with JIA are at higher risk for inflammation in the front of the eye, called uveitis or iritis. JIA may last a limited time, such as a few months or years, but in some cases, it is a lifelong disease that requires treatment into adulthood.

With treatment, most children achieve periods of wellness (remission), and sometimes the disease goes away permanently with no further need for medications. It is important to see a doctor early if your child has swollen or stiff joints because delaying therapy can lead to joint damage.

JIA has no known cause, but it can be caused by genes, the environment, or exposure to certain things. There is no cure for JIA, but treatments can help with symptoms so children can live a full and active life.

Treatment plans typically include:

Medication, such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), slow-acting anti-rheumatic drugs (SAARDs), corticosteroids, and antimetabolites, Physical activity, Self-care, such as healthy eating, hot and cold therapies, topicals, mind-body therapies, and supplements.

Studies show a diet rich in these foods may help reduce inflammation:

- Dark leafy greens (kale, spinach, etc.)
- Broccoli
- Cherries
- Berries (blueberries, blackberries, strawberries)
- Healthy fats (extra virgin olive oil, avocados, walnuts, almonds, pistachios)
- Fatty fish (salmon, tuna, mackerel, sardines)
- Whole grains (100 percent whole wheat bread, quinoa, brown rice, steel-cut oatmeal, buckwheat)
- Beans (black beans, chick peas, kidney beans)
- Lentils
- Onions

Studies also show that foods high in saturated fat and sugar and low in fiber trigger inflammation. These include the highly processed or packaged “junk” foods you typically find in the middle aisles of the grocery store, such as:

- Microwaveable meals
- “Just add water” meals like ramen and easy macaroni and cheese
- Fast food
- Frozen pizza
- Fried foods (French fries, fish sticks, onion rings, fried mozzarella sticks)
- White bread or anything else made with white flour like cake, donuts, cookies and pastries
- Red meat
- Candy
- Chips
- Soda (even diet!) and energy drinks
- Sugary snack foods and cereals

Remember to contact your doctor if you think that your loved one is showing signs of JIA.



Sherry Eagle, WIC Director