

What is JIA?

For Parents & Carers



JIA (Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis) is a condition that starts when you are young (Juvenile), it has no known cause (Idiopathic), and it causes inflammation (swelling) in the joints. There can sometimes be inflammation in the eyes (Uveitis). A small number of children also develop inflammation in other organs in the body and can experience fevers and rashes – this form of JIA is known as Systemic Onset JIA (SJIA).

JIA is an autoimmune condition – this means that the body's immune system does not work as it should. The job of the immune system is to protect your body, but in JIA, the immune system goes into over-drive.

Inside your joints, there is a small gap filled with fluid between the bones. When JIA is 'active' (known as a 'flare'), the immune system produces too much fluid in this area, and the lining of the joint gets thicker. This is why joints sometimes look swollen, and they can feel warm to the touch.

Doctors and healthcare teams work hard to find the right medicine as well as the right amount of physical activity and physiotherapy to keep your JIA from being active. The aim is to send it into remission, meaning it is inactive and does not affect you in any way. In some children and young people, this is straightforward, and in others it takes time. This is because scientists do not yet know which medicines work best for which person and every child or young person's journey with JIA is unique. There is a huge amount of research underway at the moment to find a way of 'personalising' treatment – the right medicine for the right person at the right time so hopefully soon it will be easier for healthcare teams to be sure what the best approach is for each patient.

In the meantime, rest assured that the vast majority of children and young people do very well with their JIA. They find the right treatment for them and are able to get on with their lives and achieve academically, socially and physically alongside their peers. Some may grow out of their JIA, whereas a smaller group may keep their JIA as they grow up.

A typical life with JIA would include episodes of flare with stretches of remission (disease inactivity) in between,, although some may only ever have one flare. Families can find the unpredictability hard especially at the start, but most would agree that it is best to take one day at a time.



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