Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic, destructive, inflammatory arthropathy manifested by articular and extra-articular features. RA has profound effects on patient function and morbidity and exacts a substantial economic burden from affected persons. Although the pathology of the synovial inflammation and cartilage destruction that occurs in patients with RA has been described for decades, many important developments in the understanding of genetic influences and immunopathophysiologic mechanisms have recently been denoted. Understanding rheumatoid arthritis (RA) 1 How RA affects joints 1 Who develops RA? 2 Causes of RA 2 Diagnosing RA 3 RA by the numbers 3 Coping with RA symptoms 4. Living with RA 5 Lifestyle changes 5 RA and pregnancy 8 Medication therapies 9 Protecting your bones 9 Surgery 10 Ongoing care 10. Rheumatoid arthritis is characterized by synovial inflammation and hyperplasia (swelling), autoantibody production (rheumatoid factor and anti-citrullinated protein antibody [ACPA]), cartilage and bone destruction (deformity), and systemic features, including cardiovascular, pulmonary, psychological, and skeletal disorders. The onset of rheumatoid arthritis is also associated with adverse life events.