

Study of Rheumatoid Arthritis Remission through Complementary and Alternative Therapy

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Abstract: Limited information is present on the effectiveness of Complementary and Alternative Medicines (CAM) for Rheumatoid Arthritis (RA). The purpose of this study was to determine the role of CAM in a patient diagnosed with RA and whether it is helpful in remission of the disease. For this study, a survey was circulated amongst patients across various age groups who are diagnosed with RA. Factors like gender, number of years of affliction, types of medicines used (allopathic, homeopathic, and ayurvedic), and lifestyle and dietary changes were recorded. The aim was to observe the role of these factors in disease remission. 25 patients in the age group of 38-75 were surveyed, and it was noted that remission was possible using complementary and alternative therapy if the disease was diagnosed early (within 3 years). 44% of patients relied on homeopathic medicine and 24% on ayurvedic medicines. 68% observed remission using these alternative medicines. 60% of patients reported that lifestyle changes including practicing yoga, strength training, and aerobics amongst others improved the range of motion in joints. These mechanisms were beneficial irrespective of the type of medication that the patient had adopted. 64% of patients reported following a diet regimen that included anti-inflammatory foods which reduced the instances of flare-ups. Complementary and Alternative Medicines prove to be strong and effective means of RA remission, thereby improving the quality of life in patients.

Keywords: Rheumatoid Arthritis, Autoimmune disorder, Immune System, Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Remission, Joints, DMARDs, Homeopathic, Ayurvedic, Lifestyle Changes, Anti-inflammatory foods

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disorder that affects joints and can cause damage to other body parts as well (DeSanto, 2021). The immune system attacks the synovial lining of the joints as it mistakes the body's cells for foreign invaders. The inflamed synovium becomes thick and makes the joints painful, appearing reddish and swollen (Makani, 2020). This eventually causes bone erosion and results in joint deformity. Rheumatoid Arthritis was first described in 1800 by Dr. Augustin Jacob Landre Beauvais (1772–1840) of Paris.

According to the Global Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors (GBD) study conducted in 2017, almost 20 million people worldwide were living with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) (Cowen, 2019). The United Kingdom had the highest prevalence and incidence rates and Sri Lanka had the lowest rates (Cowen, 2019). Research shows that on early diagnosis, there is a possibility of disease remission using complementary and alternative medicine.

Research says that genetic or environmental factors trigger the onset of Rheumatoid Arthritis in some individuals (NHS, 2020). People who smoke have an increased risk of developing the disease. Middle-aged women are more likely than men to develop rheumatoid arthritis, though it is not attributed to any one specific reason (Zelman, 2020). Stress is also a big trigger for the condition as it triggers off the immune system's inflammatory response due to which cytokines are released. Cytokines increase the severity of rheumatoid arthritis in some patients. Inflammation is directly proportional to exposure to stress (Shaikh, 2020).

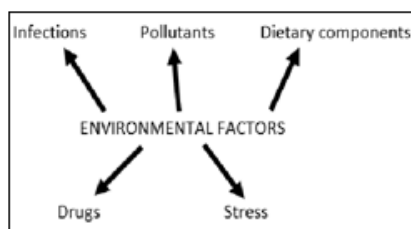


Figure 1: Environmental Triggers of Rheumatoid Arthritis

Symptoms like inflammation, joint pain, tenderness, swelling, and stiffness are typical of Rheumatoid Arthritis and they worsen following rest. This disorder affects the wrist, fingers, and hands, with mostly the same joints impacted on both sides of the body. Many people with RA get extremely tired and may develop a low-grade fever. Developing acute inflammation and worsening of other symptoms is called a flare. The disease may also affect other organs like skin, eyes, lungs, heart, nerves, and blood (Wikipedia contributors, 2021). This could result in a low red blood cell count, inflamed lungs, and inflammation around the heart.

Taking a cue from the symptoms, the diagnosis should be done by physical examination of joints. Certain imaging tests, such as an ultrasound, X-Ray, and MRI tests show the occurrence and severity of joint damage. Several types of blood tests help to determine the condition like the Rheumatoid factor test, Anti Citrullinated protein antibody test (anti-CCP), and Erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR) (*Rheumatoid Arthritis: How Does Your Doctor Diagnose It?*, 2000). The ESR test helps to determine the degree of inflammation in the patient's body, not the cause of the inflammation. Inflammation and pain can be alleviated by multiple lines of treatment.

Treatments include modern medicine, complementary and alternative medicine, dietary changes, lifestyle changes, exercise, and meditation. Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) help to lessen the pain and inflammation. Disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs) work by blocking the body's immune system response, thereby slowing down the progression of the disease. Frequently used DMARDs include HCQ (Hydroxychloroquine), Saz (Sulfasalazine), and Methotrexate. This limits the damage to joints. Biologic DMARDs help by providing a targeted response to inflammation instead of blocking the body's entire immune system response. They are advised for people who don't respond to DMARDs. Janus kinase (JAK) inhibitors are a new type of DMARDs that block certain

immune responses (*Understanding Rheumatoid Arthritis--Treatment*, 2005).

Patients often look to complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) for additional sources of relief and due to the plethora of side effects associated with allopathic (standard medical) medicine. Joint pain and arthritis are among the top five most common reasons that Americans seek CAM (Johns Hopkins Arthritis Center, 2011). Homeopathy, naturopathy, Ayurveda, acupuncture, yoga, and meditation are the various types of CAM treatments available (Johns Hopkins Arthritis Center, 2011). Homeopathic practitioners use concoctions based on spices and herbs for treatment. Some commonly used homeopathic medicines include Colchicine, Bryorheum, and Arnica. Herbs like turmeric, Toxicodendron,

Apis mellifica, and Bryonia are extensively used for preparing homeopathic medicines (*Which Homeopathic Remedies Work for Rheumatoid Arthritis?*, 2021).

On surveying a sample group of 25 patients (Ages 38-75 years), it has been observed that remission is possible using complementary and alternative therapy if the disease is diagnosed close to onset. 44% of patients rely on homeopathic medicine and 24% on ayurvedic medicines. 68% have observed remission using these alternative medicines. The reasons for the popularity of these therapies are multiple. No side effects have been reported so far with the usage of homeopathy, Ayurveda, and naturopathy. They have reportedly been able to give relief from pain and flare-ups to patients. Most patients have been

using homeopathic/ayurvedic medicines for years and have reported stabilization in their condition. This implies that disease progression is arrested.

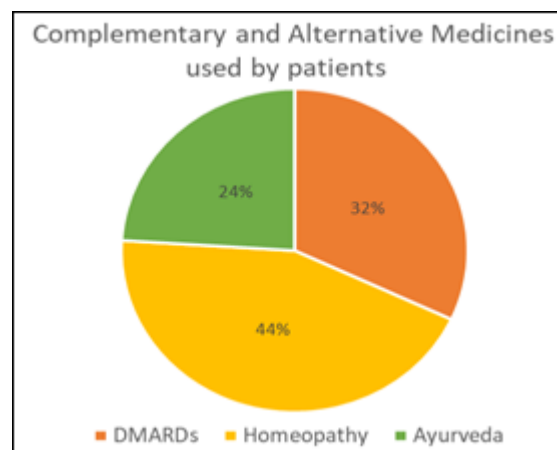


Figure 2

Stress reduction techniques like meditation have a calming effect on the mind, thus helping to relieve stress. Practicing deep breathing and meditation have helped to reduce inflammation and improve memory and attention. 60% of patients have reported that lifestyle changes including practicing yoga, strength training, aerobics, stretching helps to improve the range of motion in joints, strengthen muscles and increase mobility. These mechanisms are beneficial irrespective of the type of medication that one has adopted.

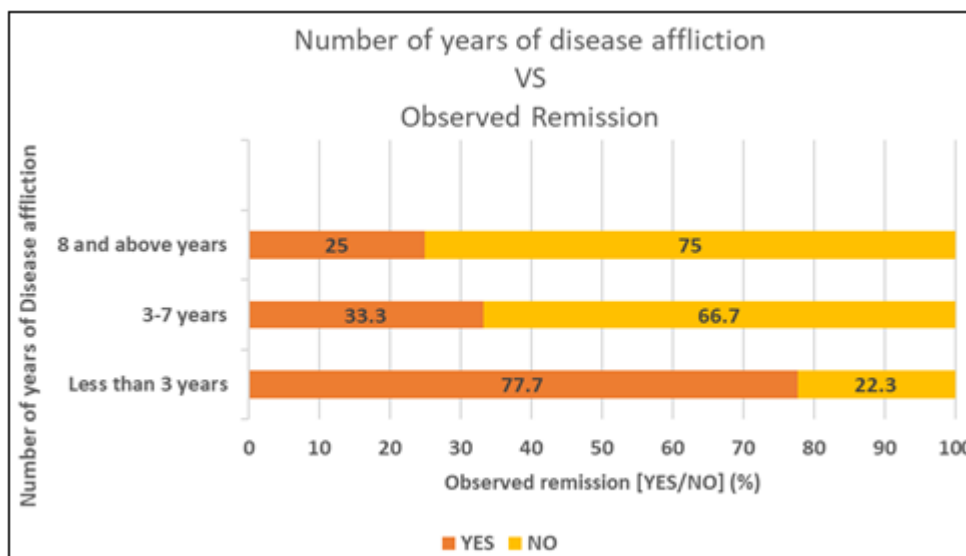


Figure 3

Additionally, including foods in a diet loaded with omega 3 fatty acids, antioxidants, fiber, and vitamins has shown to be very useful. Fibrous foods help to reduce inflammatory responses which decrease C-reactive protein levels. Studies suggest that some foods can help to decrease chronic inflammation. Natural foods like berries, ginger, turmeric, green tea, fatty fish can help to reduce inflammation (Wartenberg, 2021). 64% of patients have reported following a diet regimen including anti-inflammatory foods. Usage of

such foods in addition to other precautions/ medication has been shown to help reduce instances of flare-ups. Specifically from an Indian perspective, the complementary line of treatment in addition to a diet rich in anti-inflammatory spices/ foods coupled with yoga/meditation seems to be miraculously effective in arresting disease progression.

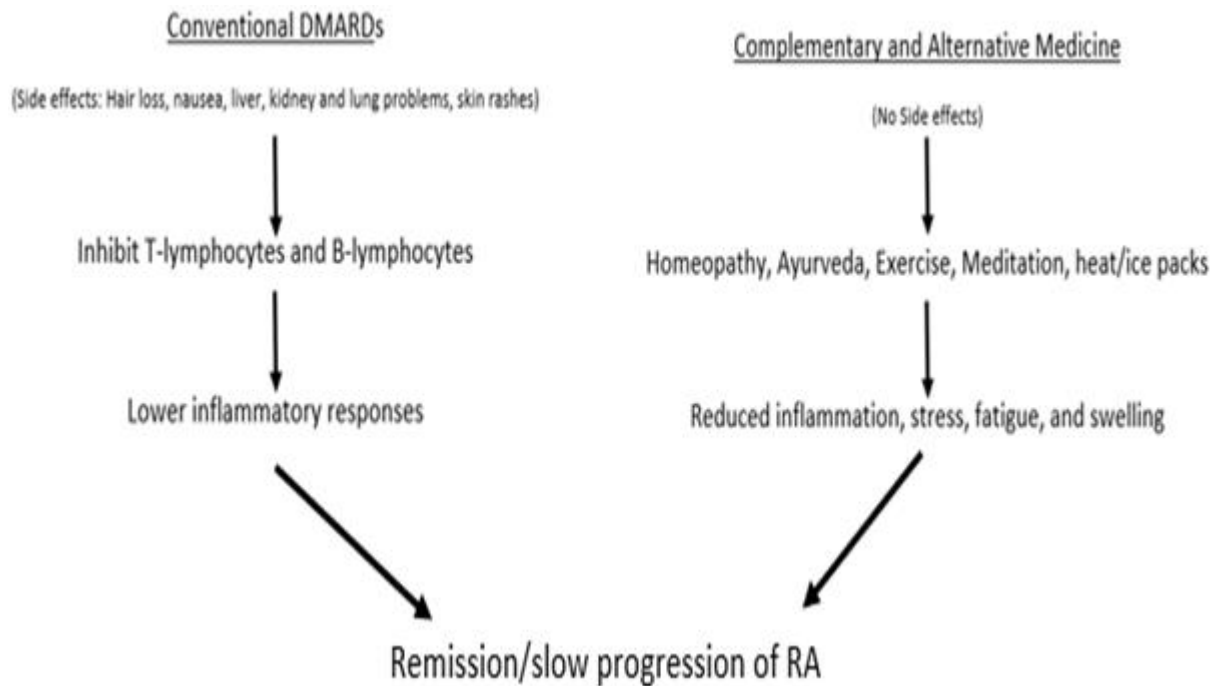


Figure 4: Comparison between DMARDs and Complementary and Alternative Medicine

After a review of all aspects associated with the disease, we learn that there is no absolute cure for Rheumatoid Arthritis. Remission is possible and all patients need to consciously work towards it. Every patient responds differently to different treatments.

Complementary and alternative treatments are very strong and effective means to reduce inflammation, thereby improving the quality of life in patients. Research shows that on early diagnosis, there is a possibility of disease remission using complementary and alternative medicine. In this killing pace of life, where a lot of individuals are burning the candle at both ends, we need to prioritize health and not ignore any signs and symptoms that our body gives us.

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