**Rheumatoid Arthritis**

Rheumatoid Arthritis is an idiopathic autoimmune disease with no cure. This meaning that there is no real reason found of why this disease occurs. Because this is an autoimmune disease, it means that the body attacks its own immune system. The results from this disease are inflammation of the joints and affect the surrounding tissues and organs. Chronic RA also causes deterioration and deformity of bone, which is cause by the inflammation destroying the surrounding bone and cartilage.   
  
**Symptoms**   
 In the early stages of RA most people don’t experience any signs, but it develops as the time goes on. With this disease, symptom can come and go. People generally feel fine when the joints are no inflamed. When the inflammation is present some of the symptoms include, fatigue, muscle aches, pain, loss of range of motion of joints, and swelling due to synovial fluid build-up. In small joints of the body RA tends to have a big effect on ones activities of daily living such as, walking or writing. Due to the fact that RA is a systemic disease, its inflammation can get to the bodily organs and effect things such as the eyes and mouth (causing dryness), lungs (causing shortness of breath) and reduction of RBCs cells and WBCs (making the body more susceptible to infection). Also nerves can get pinched causing carpel tunnel syndrome and blood vessels can burst causing blood vessel inflammation called vasculitis.   
  
**Treatment for Rheumatoid Arthritis**

Since there is not cure for Rheumatoid Arthritis the main goal of treatment is to minimize inflammation in order to reduce pain, to improve function in the joint and to prevent distortion of bone and cartilage. Aggressive treatment in the early stages help slow down and improve the outcomes of this disease. With close monitoring of or RA by doctor, medication and regular Massage therapy sessions increases the chance of the patient having a normal life with limited discomfort.  
 There are two types of drugs taken, first line and second line drugs. First line drugs are aspirin and cortisone, used to relieve pain and inflammation in later stages. The second line drugs are more aggressive. Drugs such as gold, [methotrexate](http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=824) (Rheumatrex, Trexall), and [hydroxychloroquine](http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=805) (Plaquenil), are most effective when used in earlier stages in order to promote disease reduction and prevent further joint destruction. They best outcome for RA patients is caused by early detection of the disease in combination with second-line “slow acting” drugs.   
 Massage therapy help RA patients in multiple ways. With this disease comes, decreased range on motion, pain and postural malaligment due to “flare ups” (inflammation) that clients experience. According to studies massage therapy can increase range of motion, decrease pain, improve posture and prolong or interrupt inflammation. The way to do this is by using techniques such as effleurage, muscle stripping, lymphatic drainage, specific kneading, and Direct fascial techniques. At first effleurage should be used with the combination with petrissage in order to establish trust, relaxation and prepare muscle tissues. Once client is relaxed, therapist should use direct fascial techniques in order to loosen the restricted fascia that comes with immobility and bad posture. Following this, muscle stripping should be used on muscles surrounding the affected joint in order to decrease tension and release trigger points that might have resulted from compensation due to pain. Specific kneading and friction should be used in areas with high lymph in order to increase lymphatic flow. These techniques in combination with exercises aiming to promote strength in weak muscles all keep the surrounding structures strong and the joint stable. This promotes less bone collision and bone destruction, which in turn decreases amount of inflammation “flare ups” and prolongs deformation of bone.   
  
**Bibliography**

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