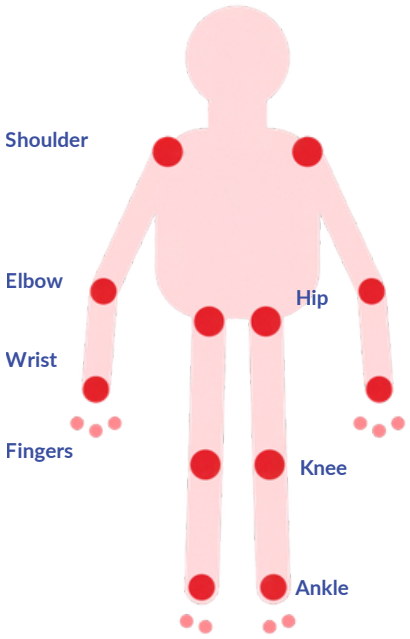
Learn to recognize an inflamed joint

Visual summary of the Self-Care Manual for people with rheumatic and musculoskeletal diseases

FUNARP
Fundación de Artritis Reumatoide de Panamá

1 · Warning signs and where to look



- Visible swelling compared with the opposite side
- Redness of the skin
- Warmth to the touch
- Pain when moving or pressing
- Stiffness on waking
- Trouble bending or straightening

> 30 min ofmorning stiffness is an important sign to discuss with your doctor.

Keyfact: inrheumatoid arthritis,the small joints of the hands and feet often become inflamed **symmetrically** (thesame finger on both hands). Share this with your doctors.

● large joint ● small joint

2 · Your 5-step self-check

1. Pick a quiet moment, always at the same time
2. Compare both sides of the body, joint by joint
3. Press gently with your fingertips, without forcing
4. Note any swelling, warmth, redness or pain, and where
5. Record how long morning stiffness lasts

3 · If you spot an inflamed joint

Local cold

Forwarmth or marked swelling: a cold pack wrapped in cloth, for short periods.

Gentle heat

For morning stiffness: a warm shower or warm pack to ease into movement.

Active rest

Restthe joint,but keep moving it gently within a comfortable range.

Don't force it

Avoidbearing weight or straining the joint while it is inflamed.

📝 **In practice:** keep a simple log of **date · joint · duration · pain level**. It is valuable information for your next appointment.

When to seek medical care

These signs need medical evaluation, not just self-help:

- Fever + inflamed joint
- Very severe swelling
- Redness with warmth
- You cannot move the joint

info@funarp.org · +507 6411-0568 · www.funarp.org

This material does not replace medical treatment or your medications.

10 areas to care for yourself, one step at a time

Non-drug therapies that complement (not replace) your medical treatment

The manual's 10 areas

AREA 1

Learn about non-drug therapies

Strategies that don't involve taking a medication; they work alongside it.

AREA 2

Get informed and take part

Writedown your questions and decide together with your doctor.

AREA 3

Stay active

Endurance, strengthand flexibility; less sitting.

AREA 4

Therapeutic exercise

Guided by physiotherapy; tell normal discomfort from warning pain.

AREA 5

Manage your weight

Sustainable changes; less load on knees and hips.

AREA 6

Protect your joints

Canes, splints,insoles and occupational therapy, early.

AREA 7

Adapt your surroundings and work

Breaks, furniture, and know your workplace rights.

AREA 8

Look after your emotional wellbeing

Breathing, relaxation and psychological support if it persists.

AREA 9

Use the manual to track

Logactivity, pain and symptoms; bring it to appointments.

AREA 10

Review your progress

Sharewith yourteam and adjust. Celebrate every gain.

Your 4-week route

Week 1

Understand and get informed
Areas 1 & 2
Therapies and active participation

Week 2

Move and get stronger
Areas 3 & 4
Physical activity and guided exercise

Week 3

Care for body and surroundings
Areas 5, 6 & 7
Weight, joint protection and environment

Week 4

Emotions and tracking
Areas 8, 9 & 10
Wellbeing, tracking and medical review

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
✓	✓	✓		✓		

Tick each day with ✓ when you practice a non-drug therapy. Example goal: 4 of 7 days. Choose just 1 or 2 areas per week.

Start today

10 minutes of walking, most days



Adjust intensity during flares without giving up movement. Check with your doctor before starting a new program.

✅ Your quick checklist

- ☐ Write 3 questions for your next appointment
- ☐ Ask for a physiotherapy or nutrition referral
- ☐ Identify the daily activity that hurts most
- ☐ Note a difficulty at work or at home
- ☐ Tell your doctor how you feel emotionally
- ☐ Set a fixed monthly date to review your progress

💙 **Remember:** managing a chronic disease is a process, not a single goal. Following these recommendations is as important as taking your medications.

Based on EULAR recommendations (2013, 2018, 2021 and 2023) on self-care and non-drug therapies, adapted by the FUNARP Education Committee.

info@funarp.org
www.funarp.org/wad_2026/#Autocuidado