

Newburyport Public Schools Health Condition Guide for Teachers

Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis



What is Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA)?

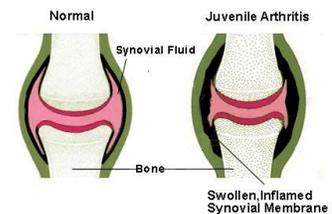
Children can get arthritis just like adults. Arthritis is caused by inflammation of the joints. It causes pain, swelling, stiffness, and loss of motion. The most common type that children get is juvenile idiopathic arthritis (idiopathic means “from unknown causes”).

Juvenile arthritis is usually an autoimmune disorder. As a rule, the immune system helps fight off harmful bacteria and viruses. But in an autoimmune disorder, the immune system attacks some of the body’s healthy cells and tissues. Scientists don’t know why this happens or what causes the disorder.

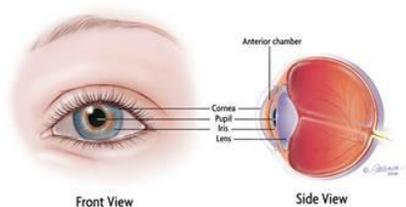
What Are the Symptoms and Signs of JIA?

The most common symptoms of JIA are joint swelling, pain, and stiffness. Usually it affects the knees, hands, and feet, and it’s worse in the morning or after a nap. Other signs include:

- Limping in the morning because of a stiff knee
- Excessive clumsiness
- High fever and skin rash
- Swelling in lymph nodes in the neck and other parts of the body.
- Some children can develop eye inflammation and their eyesight may be affected.

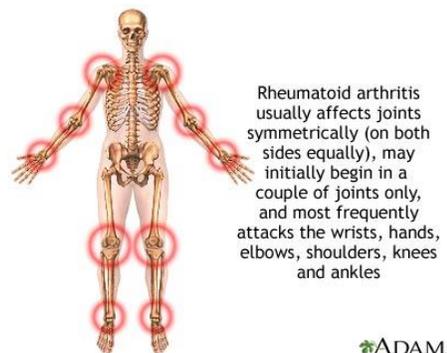


Most children with arthritis have times when the symptoms get better or go away (remission) and other times when they get worse (flare). Arthritis in children can cause eye inflammation and growth problems. It also can cause bones and joints to grow unevenly.



How is JIA managed in school?

Juvenile arthritis can affect the student's mobility, strength and endurance. Students may come to school with varying degrees of pain and stiffness. The nature of these diseases may cause irregular absences, because arthritis can go from symptom-free periods to flares of swelling and pain very quickly.



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When the student experiences a flare, modifications may need to be made. When the student is not experiencing a flare, s/he can be encouraged to be active and allowed to self-limit activities for joint protection.

Suggested accommodations and modifications include:

- Reduce homework if the child has fatigue or decreased endurance levels.
- If possible, adjust the class schedule as morning stiffness may lead to late arrival.
- Allow extra time to change classes, arrange for classes to be close to each other, avoid stairways whenever possible, and allow use of the elevator.
- Plan stretch breaks; assign a seat that provides extra room for a student to extend his/her legs and stand or stretch as needed; and consult with OT/PT about alternate chairs and desks as needed.
- Writing may be difficult when arthritis affects the student's hands. It may be difficult to hold a pencil and write for any length of time. Timed written tests may need to be changed or extended. And consider other ways to protect hand joints:
 - Use foam shells to build up pens and pencils
 - Felt tip pens require less effort
 - Computers or other electronic devices can be used for writing assignments
 - Record lectures, copy another student's notes or give the student copies of teacher overheads
 - Provide extra time for written tests or allow the student to give answers orally
 - Shorten or modify long writing assignments, such as term papers
- Relieve neck stiffness with a book holder that keeps the book at a comfortable reading angle, or change the height or other positioning of the student's chair.
- Recruit a "buddy" to help carry heavy items such as books and with everyday tasks such as opening milk cartons.
- Provide a second set of textbooks to be kept at home.
- Modify physical education as needed. Appropriate exercise is very important for the child with arthritis.
- Modify "emergency drills" as needed to ensure that the student can act quickly in a safe manner.

Excerpted from: *What is Juvenile Arthritis*, National Institutes of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, March 2009; and *School Success* by the Arthritis Foundation at <http://www.arthritis.org/ja-school-success.php>

See the following for further information:

- [When a Young Person has Arthritis: A Guide for Teachers](#)
- [Juvenile Arthritis: Arthritis Foundation](#)
- [Questions and Answers about Juvenile Arthritis: National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases](#)