

Remission in Inflammatory Rheumatic Conditions

For people living with an inflammatory rheumatic condition, remission improves quality of life, reduces long-term health risks and strengthens the overall healthcare system by avoiding the unnecessary costs resulting from sub-optimal care. Pursuing remission therefore offers value to patients, providers and healthcare systems alike.

Q: What are Inflammatory Rheumatic Conditions?

Inflammatory rheumatic conditions are characterized by inflammation of the joints, muscles and connective tissues and include arthritis, axial spondyloarthritis (axSpA), lupus, gout and more.

Q: What is the Burden of Inflammatory Rheumatic Conditions?

Inflammatory rheumatic conditions are among the most prevalent of chronic inflammatory conditions, affecting as many as 135 million people worldwide.¹ Inflammatory rheumatic conditions are characterized by chronic pain, increased disability, and declining productivity. As the population ages, economies transform, societies urbanize, and environmental risks increase, the prevalence of these inflammatory conditions is only expected to rise as well.

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA), for instance, is a leading cause of disability due to joint damage, chronic pain and fatigue. RA affects 18 million people worldwide.² The Global Burden of Disease study found a loss of over 3.5 million disability-adjusted life years due to RA.³ Like other inflammatory rheumatic conditions, RA can significantly impact quality of life and daily functioning, reduce life expectancy and increase the risk of comorbid conditions such as cardiovascular disease.



Q: What is Remission?

Remission is the disappearance of the signs and symptoms of a disease. It can either be complete, with no detectable evidence of disease, or partial, with a highly significant decrease in disease activity.⁴

Remission for inflammatory rheumatic conditions doesn't necessarily mean a cure. Instead, it indicates a state where the disease is inactive. For many inflammatory conditions, remission is achievable with early diagnosis and timely access to effective treatment. Not every patient can reach remission, which is why disease control is critical.

Q: How is Remission Different from Disease Control?

Disease control means managing a condition so that its symptoms are minimized but still present. In contrast, remission means that the disease's activity, signs and symptoms have either disappeared completely or fallen below detection. Both are important goals, but remission offers greater improvement in quality of life. Patients in remission report significantly higher scores in health surveys, reflecting better physical and mental health.^{5,6,7}

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Q: How is Remission Achieved?

Achieving remission often requires early diagnosis, timely access to the most appropriate treatment—including advanced therapies such as biologics, where appropriate—and informed decision making between patients and clinicians.⁸ Treatment strategies include medications provided on an individualized basis, positive lifestyle changes and regular monitoring through clinical assessment and lab tests.⁹ Treatment is frequently not initiated within the therapeutic window of 12 weeks despite studies showing that early, aggressive treatment can double the chances of achieving remission compared to delayed care.¹⁰

Adherence to prescribed therapies, shared decision-making and proactive disease management all improve the likelihood of remission for inflammatory rheumatic conditions.



Q: What are the Benefits of Achieving Remission?

A strategic, systematic approach that equips more people with inflammatory rheumatic conditions to pursue remission could deliver a wide range of benefits, including:



Reduced stress on overburdened healthcare systems. Patients in remission require fewer resources from the healthcare system.¹¹ Because they live free of disease signs and symptoms, these patients may need fewer diagnostics, tests, treatments and appointments with healthcare providers. As populations age and healthcare provider shortages persist, policies and practices that relieve stress on overburdened healthcare systems are urgently needed. These benefits could be most pronounced in lower- and middle-income countries with limited health system capacity.¹²



Improved patient outcomes and quality of life. Evidence demonstrates that patients who achieve remission have significantly improved quality of life. For those living with a chronic inflammatory condition, achieving remission means less pain and fatigue, improved mental health, and greater personal prosperity and community engagement.^{13,14,15} Mitigating the chronic pain for people with inflammatory arthritis, for example, is cited as a key priority for patients.¹⁶



Societal and economic gains. Patients who achieve remission become better able to work productively and contribute to society economically. At the same time, they are not incurring the costs associated with disability benefits, social care and long-term hospital utilization. Prioritizing remission empowers people with a chronic inflammatory condition to lead economically productive lives and reduce healthcare costs, benefiting both the individuals themselves and society.^{17,18} One study found that remission was associated with 19–52% savings in direct medical costs and 37–75% savings in indirect costs.¹⁹

Patients who achieve remission benefit from an improved quality of life, including less pain, reduced fatigue and the ability to engage more fully in daily activities.

Patients who achieve remission benefit from an improved quality of life.



Q: What are Barriers to the Pursuit of Remission?

Barriers that prevent people with inflammatory rheumatic conditions from pursuing remission include:

- **Patients lacking information** about their condition and range of treatment options
- **Patients not having access** to specialized care providers and multidisciplinary teams
- **A shortage of specialists** who are equipped with the knowledge necessary to support patients in pursuing remission as a clinical outcome
- **Low awareness** amongst healthcare providers of clinical guidelines
- **Lack of access to a full range of advanced therapies**, including biologics
- **Policymakers being unaware** about the benefits of early diagnosis and optimal inflammatory rheumatic disease care

By addressing these barriers stakeholders can make the pursuit of remission possible for people with inflammatory rheumatic conditions.



Conclusion

Millions of people worldwide live with rheumatoid inflammatory rheumatic conditions—many without adequate care. Prioritizing the pursuit of remission promises significant benefits, not only for patients but also for healthcare systems. Achieving disease remission can reduce healthcare costs, improve patient outcomes and foster economic health.

However, the pursuit of remission is hindered by systemic barriers. Addressing these challenges—and supporting sustaining remission once it has been achieved—is crucial to realize the full potential of remission in inflammatory arthritis, both for patients' quality of life and healthcare efficiency.



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