

Acute Rheumatic Fever



What is Acute Rheumatic Fever (ARF)?

Acute Rheumatic Fever (ARF) is a sickness that happens when your body's immune system starts attacking healthy parts of your body after fighting a bacterial infection.

If it's not treated, ARF can cause long-term damage to your heart (this is called Rheumatic Heart Disease, or RHD), which makes it harder for your heart to work properly.

What causes Acute Rheumatic Fever?

ARF is caused by a bacterial infection called Group A Streptococcus. You might have this infection in your throat (like tonsillitis) or on your skin (a skin sore).

After your body fights the infection, sometimes the immune system can get confused and attack healthy areas like your heart, joints, or brain.

How did I get Acute Rheumatic Fever?

The bacteria that causes ARF spreads from person to person when someone with the infection talks, coughs, or sneezes near you.

You can also get it by touching infected sores on someone's skin. But not all infections with this bacteria will turn into ARF.

Living in overcrowded homes can make it easier for the bacteria to spread between people, which increases the risk of getting ARF.

ARF and RHD mainly affect First Nations peoples, Pacific Islanders, and Māori communities, especially in the top end of Australia.

Children aged 5 to 14 are at the highest risk of getting ARF for the first time.

How do I feel / How do I look with Acute Rheumatic Fever?

ARF can feel different for everyone.

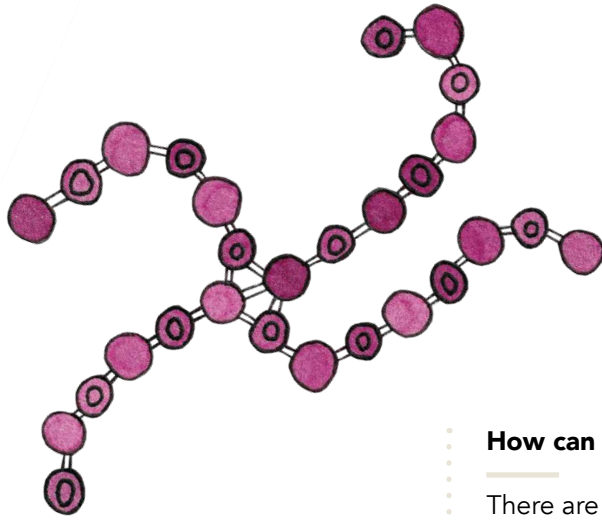
Common symptoms of ARF include:

- Painful or swollen joints, like your knees, ankles, wrists, or elbows.
- Fever.
- Jerky movements or trouble walking.
- Feeling tired and run down.
- Chest pain, trouble breathing, or feeling like your heart is pounding.

Some people might also have painless lumps under their skin near their joints or get a rash.

If you have a sore throat or any of these symptoms, it's a good idea to yarn with your doctor or healthcare worker.

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How does the doctor know I have ARF?

If your doctor thinks you might have ARF or RHD, they might:

- Examine your body.
- Do a throat swab to check for bacteria.
- Take some blood tests.
- Get a chest x-ray.
- Do an ultrasound on your heart (Echocardiography).

How can we treat ARF?

If the doctor confirms you have ARF or RHD, they might treat you in the community or send you to the hospital, depending on how sick you are.

The main treatment is a type of antibiotic injection called Bicillin.

These injections are given every 3 to 4 weeks, and the treatment lasts for over 10 years.

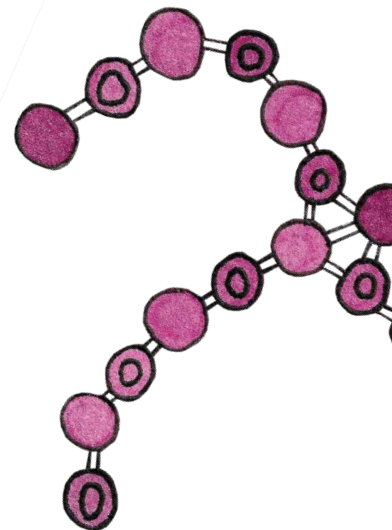
It's really important to keep getting the injections, because ARF can come back and cause more damage to your heart.

The doctor might also suggest taking pain relief medication.

How can we prevent ARF and RHD?

There are a few things we can do to prevent ARF and RHD:

- Get checked out if you have a sore throat or skin sores.
- Regular hand washing with soap and water
- Keep any cuts or sores clean.
- Wash your body every day with soap and water.
- Brush your teeth morning and night.
- Stay healthy by being active, eating well, and having regular check-ups.
- If you and your family need extra support including housing support, have a yarn with your GP, healthcare worker or social worker.



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