

## **Meri Sehat, Mere Rules (My health, My rules)**

### **Introduction by Dr Kanta Kumar**

University of Birmingham and National Rheumatoid Society (NRAS) have prepared this video. Please watch this video in order to make changes to your life.

### **Chapter 1: RA by Dr Durga**

We have an army (the immune system) which normally protects us against germs. When it starts acting against the organs of the body (in this case the joints), it results in diseases like rheumatoid arthritis. This is just like the army of a country staging a coup against its own government or turning against its people.

Rheumatoid arthritis is an inflammatory condition, driven by the immune system, whereby our joints become inflamed, leading to joint pain, swelling and stiffness, most commonly in the hands and feet. However, inflammation can affect other parts of the body as well. The exact cause of RA is unclear, but it is likely to be due to several factors. Genetics can play a role and RA can run in families. However, simply having a member in the close family who has RA does not mean that one would inevitably develop the disease. However, other factors include being female, cigarette smoking, and a recent infection can contribute. Sometimes, we may think that getting a disease like rheumatoid arthritis is a fate that we could not have avoided, like it was God's wish or the result of our actions in the past or in the past lives. However, by understanding this disease and how it affects us, we can learn to live comfortably with the disease and avoid long-term adverse situations that might arise due to the disease. Rheumatoid arthritis is a life-long condition. It is not a curable condition, but the medication should be able to control the inflammation that underpins the condition. This means that your symptoms can be managed, and the arthritis doesn't progress to damage the joints. Controlling rheumatoid arthritis requires work from both your rheumatology doctor, specialist nurse and the wider team and from you. Doctors will prescribe medication to control the inflammation and you need to take the medication as prescribed and adapt your lifestyle where needed. In any case, the medicines available today to treat rheumatoid arthritis (as opposed to twenty or thirty years back) have made it possible for individuals with rheumatoid arthritis to lead practically normal lives. You may need to adapt the way you do everyday tasks to protect your joints and occupational therapists (OTs) will show you how to look after your joints. Exercise is particularly important, both physiotherapy as well as regular daily exercise. Exercise helps maintain muscle strength, reduce pain, keep you mobile and can even reduce the inflammation of RA. You must also stop smoking; continuing to smoke with RA has been shown to be linked to worse problems with your joints. It is also important to consider diet and weight. Being overweight will result in the joints wearing out quicker from carrying extra weight. A balanced diet and appropriate portion sizes are important.

These lifestyle adjustments to look after yourself are an important part of the long-term management of your rheumatoid and need to become daily habits. This shows you are taking responsibility for your own health, and you will be supported in this by the whole rheumatology team.

### **Chapter 2: RA & CVD by Dr Singh**

Cardiovascular disease is when the body's blood vessels can get narrowed or furred up with fatty deposits (rather like the pipes of a washing machine get furred up with limescale). If this happens to the blood vessels that supply the heart, it is then harder for adequate blood to reach the heart muscle. The heart muscle is then starved of oxygen and this can cause a cramp-like pain in the centre of the chest, or perhaps down the left arm. Some people think it feels like indigestion, and some people get very little pain. We call this crampy pain angina.

A heart attack is when the furring up of the blood vessels gets so bad that one of the blood vessels taking blood to the heart completely blocks off so no blood can reach that part of the heart. The part of the heart muscle which was supplied by that blood vessel may then die and not be able to work again.

### **What causes furring up or narrowing of the blood vessels?**

The resultant stress among the general public when the country's army acts against its own people is exactly what happens to the rest of the body in rheumatoid arthritis. Just like stress causes early aging, the systemic inflammatory state in rheumatoid arthritis results in accelerating the ageing process in blood vessels (what we refer to as atherosclerosis). The presence of diseased blood vessels with atherosclerosis in a patient with rheumatoid arthritis in turn increases the risk of developing a heart attack or a brain stroke. Treating rheumatoid arthritis with medicines to lower the state of inflammation ("stress") also helps to reduce the ageing process ("atherosclerosis") in blood vessels.

This process of atherosclerosis happens in everyone as we get older but is particularly speeded up by several other factors, which are therefore called 'risk factors' for heart disease.

These are:

- Smoking
- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol levels (with high levels of bad (LDL) cholesterol and low levels of good (HDL) cholesterol)
- Being overweight
- Reduced amounts of exercise
- Being male
- Having a history of heart disease in the family

For some people it can be hard to judge their risk of heart disease. It depends on how many of the risk factors listed above someone has, but many of these are not visible from the outside. We do not know, just by looking at someone, if they have diabetes or high blood pressure for example.

### **How does rheumatoid arthritis affect the heart?**

Research has shown that people with RA are more likely to develop this sort of heart disease. There are several reasons why:

1. A person with RA may have more of the 'risk factors' described above. For example, if a person with RA is worried about exercising and worries that it may worsen their arthritis, they may do less exercise and as a result also put on weight. Doing no exercise and being overweight may also contribute to developing high blood pressure. Some anti-inflammatory tablets, which are very effective at helping to control pain for people with RA, may also contribute to developing high blood pressure. Prolonged or high doses of steroid tablets may also cause diabetes.

2. RA itself also makes people more likely to develop heart disease. RA is due to excessive inflammation, and this causes painful, swollen, tender joints. This inflammation, however, doesn't just affect the joints but also affects the blood vessels, lowers the amount of good cholesterol, and makes the blood more prone to clot. These reasons also explain why people with RA may be more prone to develop heart disease. This area is being actively researched at the moment to improve and increase our understanding.

3. Another factor to consider is that people with arthritis may not do as much exercise as other people and so may not get the warning sign of chest pain with exercise to alert them and their doctors that they need tests to see if they have heart disease. Therefore, they may miss out on being prescribed tablets which can help to look after their heart.

### **What can we do about heart disease in rheumatoid arthritis?**

The important thing about learning about heart disease in RA is that there are things that can be done to help prevent it. Heart disease is not an inevitable consequence of RA and by taking steps now, you can improve your health for the future.

Things to help prevent heart disease include:

- Stop smoking
- Be as active as possible. Taking regular exercise will not damage your joints (and in fact is good for your arthritis). It will improve your blood pressure, your cholesterol level and your weight. Exercise such as walking, swimming and cycling is good as these do not put so much strain on your joints.
- Look at what you eat. This includes both controlling your weight and having a healthy diet.
  - Controlling your weight: Losing weight will benefit your health, because it can help lower blood pressure, lower your cholesterol and reduce the risk of developing diabetes.
  - Healthy diet: Just because some people are slim doesn't mean they are healthy; some slim people may have high cholesterol levels. A healthy diet will also help lower your cholesterol level and keep your blood pressure down. A healthy diet should have plenty of fruit, vegetables and wholegrains and be low in fat, salt and sugar. The aim is to eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day. Eating vegetables, fruit, wholegrains (e.g., wholemeal chapati flour and wholemeal rice), lean proteins (e.g., fish, lentils, yogurt) and healthy fats (e.g., vegetable oils, nuts and seeds) will help your body work at its best. Some fats are bad for your health (e.g., butter, Indian sweets, fried foods) and eating too many foods high in saturated fat can increase your cholesterol levels.
- Remember to take any tablets that your doctor has prescribed for your blood pressure or cholesterol or diabetes.

### **Joti & Ayesha's Role Play: Implementing new behaviour change.**

J: I have heard if you have RA it has an effect on your heart.

A: Yes, I have heard that too.

J: It's important to keep an eye on how much sugar, salt we eat, portion size and exercise is important for our health.

A: I will begin to exercise, twice a week swimming and three times a week walking. Will you come with me.

J: Of course, I will.

## **Chapter 3: Lifestyle – Diet by Dr Atiya Kamal**

### **NHS Eat Well Plate**

Firstly, let's inspire you with this thali.

This 'thali' represents traditional foods that south Asian people eat. As you can see the thali includes a variety of healthy items from a South Asian diet including fruit, vegetables and

lentils. But traditionally, many foods are fried, for example samosas and pakoras. These foods are higher in calories, which can contribute to weight gain.

We are going to look at different ways to change some of the food that is eaten or offered in our traditions to help achieve a healthier diet.

How much salt and sugar do you consume every day? The Government guidelines say we should limit our intake to no more than 6g of salt per day. This may seem like a lot but 6g is the equivalent of 1 teaspoon \*demonstrate with teaspoon / did you know a samosa contains almost 1g of salt. It is very easy to consume 6g of salt without realising, for example, a paratha at breakfast has salt, so does roti and dahl at lunch, and again at dinner, in addition to any snacks that are eaten throughout the day. Is it possible to swap one meal with something that has less salt such as swapping a paratha for boiled eggs or having roasted chana daal, roasted almonds or cashew nuts with chaat masala or unsalted popcorn? Similarly, the same is to be said about sugar. How many teaspoons of sugar are in you cup of tea? That piece of your favourite mithai? The Government guidelines recommend that adults should have no more than 30g of sugar per day. This is roughly equivalent to 7 sugar cubes \*demonstrate with sugar cubes / did you know that 1 galab jamun (Indian sweet) contains approximately 19g of sugar\*. Reduce these treats by having smaller amounts and on fewer occasions so it stays a special treat. And if you are making mithai yourself, use low fat ingredients like low-fat milk and natural sweeteners like dried fruit and dates to make the sweets.

### **Joti & Ayesha's Role Play: Healthy Alternatives**

A – Hi Joti How you doing?

J – Good thanks – haven't seen you for so long! How are you? etc....

A – I have a dilemma – I have a dinner party to host on Friday night and am so confused as to what to cook.

J – That's easy, you can do samosas and Pakoras for starters and have some mithai for sweet

A – No, I was thinking of something healthier. I have started to avoid these type of foods as fried foods are not good for you and I have started to eat more consciously – I would like to make and offer healthy options.

J – Actually, I went to a party recently and they had good really options.

They had Grilled kebabs and delicious salads

A – That gives me an idea, last time I had friends over for starters I steamed sweet potato and cut them into cubes and added imlee chutney and thania, a little salt and roasted ground jeera. It was really easy and really healthy.

I could do that with a chickpea chaat or even simple wraps with cream cheese, olives, cucumber and lettuce

J – Yes that sounds great – then you can do the Grilled kebabs and salad for the mains – maybe chicken or lamb and for the veggies you can do paneer and vegetables or tofu and vegetables – prepare them upfront and just simply pop them on the griddle.

Add a lovely salad maybe add some naan if you think you want to.

It can all be done upfront so on the evening you will be able to relax and enjoy with your friends.

A – what about desert – Indians do like their deserts!

J – Avoid the very sweet dishes, why don't you do a fresh fruit chaat or fresh fruit platter? You could add Greek yoghurt and a drizzle of honey if you like.

A – That's a good plan!

### **Portion Control by Mrs Rumandeep Tiwana**

Another idea to inspire you with. A healthy diet isn't just about what you are eating but about how much you eat. Sometimes we overeat because we put food on a large plate and automatically fill it up even if it means having more food than is required. Here I have 2 different size bowls, one big and one small. Something for you to think about, which size bowl would you use? Does a smaller bowl mean less food, not satisfied and still hungry? Does a larger bowl mean more food, satisfied and feeling full? using a smaller bowl or plate, it will prevent you from overeating and putting on weight. The idea here is that you can still have the same foods and enjoy them but being mindful of the quantity you are eating. Here is a task for you, start plating your food into a bowl or plate one size smaller than you would normally use and see how you get on. Try it for one day, another day and see how you get on. An old habit will slowly become a new habit.

#### **Chapter 4: So, what? By Dr Atiya Kamal**

It may seem daunting to consider changing your lifestyle at first but by breaking a goal down into smaller, manageable steps, such changes can be made. Making changes gradually adds up and soon you will notice a difference.

Here is a task for you. Write all of the things you think you can change to improve your health. Then choose thing that you want to change. For example, being mindful about your portion sizes. Start with plating your meals into a smaller bowl or plate. Once you feel like you have achieved this change, set yourself another task. It is always helpful to involve other people, this includes your family and friends. Telling other people about your plans and goals will ensure that you have the maximum amount of support around you. You may find it helpful to set a time and date. Having a goal, which has a time associated with it may help you focus on the task and what you want to achieve. Make sure you reward yourself when you achieve your goals as it is important to celebrate your achievements and let others know about your successes.

It is perfectly normal to fail a few times before you succeed, therefore, do not be disheartened, this is ok. At least you know you can make the changes, you have the ability, you just need to keep trying until you can make it a long-term change.

#### **Joti & Ayesha's Role Play: Implementing new behaviour change.**

J: Hi Ayesha, I've made you a cup of tea, 2 sugars, right?

A: Yes, I guess so... but I have been thinking of reducing the sugar in my tea Joti, but I'm not sure I can do it.

J: I think it's a good idea, what's made you think about it and why are you hesitant to change?

A: I've come back from the Dr, she's told me I need to consider the way I eat including my added sugar intake, I may be pre-diabetic.

J: Ok, let me give you 1 teaspoon of sugar today and see how it tastes.

J: Are you aware that being south Asian does mean we're up to a 6 times higher risk of type 2 diabetes. Does it run in your family?

A: Yes, but it's hard to change my existing habits and it feels daunting thinking about new ways of eating.

J: I think it's good that you're thinking about your health. When my aunt was diagnosed with diabetes she started exercising and reducing her food portions to bring down her weight.

A: Did she not miss her old ways of eating?

J: She did at first, but says she feels so much stronger and better for it now.

A: Perhaps I can start with a few small changes, what did she do to begin with?

J: She slowly reduced the sugar in her tea, she stopped having cake rusk and mithai after meals. She started eating her dinner in a salad plate so the portion was smaller, but the plate still looked full.

A: Ok, I could probably do that but is it even worth it? I feel like I'm fine as I am and the Dr is worrying me for no reason.

J: There are complications that can occur from uncontrolled type 2 diabetes including heart disease, stroke, vision problems and nerve damage. If you deal with this issue now and it can prevent further issues later in life.

A: I hadn't thought about future health, maybe I can do some of the things your aunt has. I can reduce sugar in my diet, perhaps swapping out mithai for some fruit

J: Or try some Greek yoghurt and a bit of honey.

A: I could probably exercise too.

J: My aunt goes swimming a few times a week, you could try that?

A: I'm not a strong swimmer, perhaps I could do a brisk walk instead? I read somewhere that we are at higher risk of having visceral fat, the bad fat around our organs and cardiovascular exercise is good at reducing this.

J: Yes! That's a really good idea, I'll come with you sometimes if you want?

A: Sounds like a plan.

J: Oh, and perhaps have a think about switching from frying foods to oven-cooking them. I know you like your kebabs fried, but they taste just as good cooked on a grill.

A: I don't know if I'll like it as much, but I can try it. I could add salad maybe?

J: How about having a large tub of side salad prepared and packed in your fridge every Sunday, you can then get some extra vitamins and minerals in your meals during the following week. Having it prepped in advance means you save time.

A: Ok, I'll think about these ideas, thank you.

J: It is important to learn how you can help yourself as you are the person who will benefit from it. It is important to think about changing your old habits as you learn to make new habits. It is also very important to learn that making these changes to your lifestyle will not only benefit your heart but also the symptoms you get from your RA.

### **Closing comments by Dr Kanta Kumar**

You've heard from all the team and been given a lot of information. Use this information to make changes in your life. It is important to check your blood pressure, check your sugar levels. Ask your GP to check your cholesterol, and have it checked once a year.