

Goal Setting: Three Tips for Developing Disease Management Goals

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We're dedicated to sharing the perspectives of people affected by chronic inflammatory conditions like rheumatoid arthritis (RA). That's why we created [Arthritis.com](https://www.arthritis.com), a place where people living with RA can find inspiration, lifestyle advice, tools, and disease information. Following is an article from [Arthritis.com](https://www.arthritis.com) contributor [Ara Dikranian, M.D.](#) Dr. Dikranian was compensated by Pfizer to share his perspective as a rheumatologist.

Managing rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a part of daily life, and staying ahead of RA flare-ups and aching joints can seem impossible at times. That's where goal setting comes in. Goal setting, or a disease management plan, helps you work with your doctor to better manage the RA symptoms that impact your quality of life the most.

According to the [RA NarRAtive survey](#), people living with RA and their physicians both agree about the importance of goal setting.¹ However, I find that while both parties may have goals, they may not be verbalizing them as such during appointments. So, where do you begin? How can you start a dialogue around goal setting with your doctor?

Here are three of my tips for setting realistic RA disease management goals with your doctor.

1. Craft goals, together

Your doctor is your health champion and, most likely, you both have the same end goal in mind – lower RA disease activity (reduction in RA symptoms). However, your plans for getting there may look different. For example, as a rheumatologist, I may be focused on more clinical aspects, like “swollen joint counts,” and changes in certain lab scores, while your biggest concern may be feeling well enough to get up and get to work

in the morning.

I tell people living with RA that you have an important voice when it comes to managing your symptoms. Feel empowered to speak up and talk with your doctor about the aspects of your disease management plan that are most important to you, like a reduction in symptoms or making sure you feel comfortable enough to travel for your family vacation. That way, you and your doctor can align on goals and, together, you can create a plan for reaching them.

2. Set expectations and a timeline, too

In addition to speaking up about your disease management goals, feel empowered to ask your doctor, “How am I tracking toward my RA goals?” Your doctor can work with you to set expectations and develop timelines that are reflective of your goals. Doctors also play an important part in evaluating your symptoms and response to your disease management plan, especially since RA involves complex symptoms that can change regularly. Work with your doctor to regularly evaluate your disease management plan during every appointment. This will help determine if adjustments may be necessary.

3. When crafting your goals, think beyond your RA symptoms

Consider incorporating healthy eating and regular exercise* into your disease management plan; both may be beneficial to the ongoing management of RA symptoms.

Engaging with the RA community is another way to help support your RA treatment goals. Talk with other people living with RA about their experiences with goal setting; their insights could be helpful in shaping your own goals. Patient support groups offer a network of people living with RA as well as tools and resources to help you stay engaged.

Your voice is an important tool in taking control of your RA disease management plan, and goal setting can help you feel empowered to do just that. Talk with your doctor about your disease management plan at your next medical appointment.

Sign up for more tips on Arthritis.com [here](#).

*Be sure to check with your healthcare professional to see if these physical activities are right for you.

¹Gibofsky A, et al. Comparison of patient and physician perspectives in the management of rheumatoid arthritis: results from global physician- and patient-based surveys. *Health Qual Life Outcomes*. 2018;16(1):211.

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