

The background features a dark red field with vibrant, wavy lines in shades of red and gold. These lines form a large, stylized shape that resembles a hand or a protective shield. In the upper right corner, there is a cluster of small, colorful dots in red, orange, and yellow. A solid red horizontal band is positioned across the middle of the image, containing the main text.

**STAYING MOVING, STAYING STRONG  
RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS**

## WHAT IS RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS?

- Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune condition.
- This means the body's immune system thinks joints need healing even when they don't. This causes joints to get swollen and sore.
- It can affect any joint, but most often occurs in smaller joints like in the hands and feet.
- It's not known what causes rheumatoid arthritis. But you're more likely to get it if it runs in the family, you're a woman, if you are overweight or smoke.

## WHAT DOES RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS FEEL LIKE?

- It's common for people to feel joint pains. Joints can also be red and swollen (inflamed) or feel stiff.
- People have good and bad days. Bad days (e.g. when joints are sore and swollen) are called 'flare ups'.
- Rheumatoid arthritis can affect your body, mind and spirit.

**Everyone with rheumatoid arthritis has a different story.**

**"I might have been a teenager or early 20s. When, I just woke up one day, everything started swelling"  
— Wilunyu/Wajarri/Martuthunira woman, aged 34**

## HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS?

- If you feel joint pains or notice swelling have a yarn with your doctor, health worker or physio.
- To diagnose rheumatoid arthritis, your doctor might ask you to get blood tests and have an x-ray or scan.
- Your doctor might send you to a specialist doctor called a rheumatologist.



## HOW CAN I LOOK AFTER RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS?

### MEDICINES

- Medicines are an important way to control rheumatoid arthritis.
- Yarn with your doctor. They will help find the right medicines for you.

Medicines that can help are:

- Medicines to calm your immune system (called DMARDs – Disease Modifying Anti-Rheumatic Drugs e.g. methotrexate)
- Medicines to help swelling (inflammation) and pain (e.g. paracetamol, ibuprofen or cortisone)
- When starting medicines, check in with your doctor every 1-3 months about how you're feeling.

### BUSH MEDICINES

- Bush medicines may help alongside Western medicine. Yarn with your local Aboriginal health service or Cultural Elder to find out more.

### SPLINTS

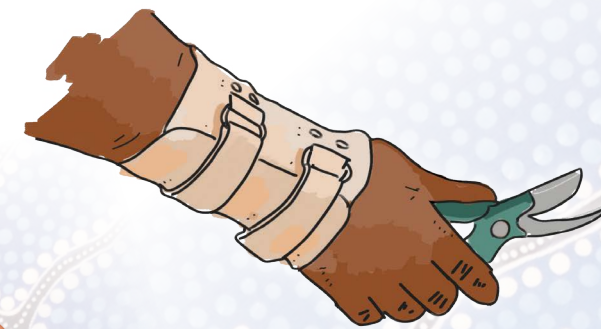
- Splints can help for hand pain and special shoes or inserts can help with foot pain. Yarn with your doctor, physio, occupational therapist or podiatrist to find out more.

## LIVE HEALTHY

- Staying moving is a good way to look after rheumatoid arthritis. It keeps your body and mind healthy too.
- Any movement is better than none. Do something you enjoy, like exercising in water or getting out and walking on Country.

**"I exercise regularly, like at a gym ... I feel better about myself, I feel better with, like, the fatigue and the pain, in managing it." — Wotjobaluk woman, aged 33**

- Starting a gym program can be good. Talk to your Aboriginal health service, physio or exercise physiologist about a plan.
- If you're having a flare up, it's ok to rest. Get moving again when you feel better.
- Cut down, or if you can, get off the smokes. This will keep your body healthy and help with your joint pain.





## HOW CAN I LOOK AFTER RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS?

- Not sleeping well can make pain worse. Good sleep at night can help your joint pain and keep your mind healthy too.
- Rheumatoid arthritis can make you feel down and frustrated. Look after your moods and stress. Yarn about your feelings with family, your doctor or staff at your Aboriginal health service.

## SURGERY

- Most people look after rheumatoid arthritis without surgery. For a small number of people surgery can help.
- Yarn with your doctor to see if surgery is an option for you.

## DON'T BE SHAME ABOUT ASKING QUESTIONS

The more you know about your rheumatoid arthritis, the more you can be in charge of your health and wellbeing.

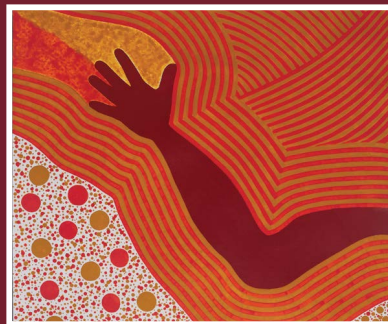
Some questions you could ask your doctor:

- What causes rheumatoid arthritis?
- Why do I get flare ups?
- What can I do to look after rheumatoid arthritis?
- What medicines can help?
- What can be side effects of these medicines?
- What is going to happen in the future?
- Where can I go for help?

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

### THOMAS MARKS – LIVING WITH ARTHRITIS

Thomas 'Marksey' Marks is a proud Wotjobaluk/ Gunaikurnai man from Gippsland. Being one of many Stolen Generations children, he wasn't able to grow up on his traditional Country. As an adult, he is now proudly reclaiming his Aboriginal identity through art. In his artwork 'Living With Arthritis' Thomas tells the story of his struggle with arthritis and the journey he is on to fight back against the pain. It's also a story for others who experience arthritis and go through life followed by this lingering pain.



### NICOLE DICKERSON – HEALING TOGETHER

Nicole is a Yamaji Woman from Geraldton Western Australia with connections to the Amangu, Naaguja, Wilunyu and Ngarluma People. Nicole grew up interested in art with her creative ways coming from her Dad. Nicole's art is her form of healing, strength, her words when she cannot speak, and most importantly it's her story. In 'Healing together' Nicole tells the story of how the rain falls on the land, connecting people, cleansing the mind, body & soul, from one place that connects two, to support Healing Together on one land.



## WHERE CAN I GO FOR HELP?

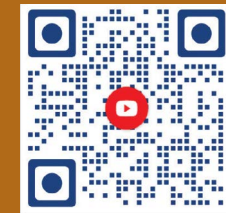
If joint pains are stopping you from living well, have a yarn with your doctor, health worker or physio.

If you'd like help finding your local Aboriginal health service have a look at these links:

<https://askizzy.org.au>

<https://www.naccho.org.au/naccho-map>

## WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS?



Scan here  
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An audio version of the brochure can also be accessed by scanning the QR code or going to [www.stayingstrongwitharthritis.org.au](http://www.stayingstrongwitharthritis.org.au)



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