Rheumatoid arthritis is a chronic inflammatory rheumatismal disease with a frequency ranging from five out of a thousand to one out of a hundred people in the population. Actually it is the most common rheumatismal disease in adult population. In this disease, mainly the small joints of hands and feet but also knees, elbows, shoulders are symmetrically affected. Tenderness, swelling, redness and stiffness were seen in the affected joints. If this inflammation continues without appropriate treatment then limited range of motion in the joints, joint degeneration and contractures and eventually joint loss can occur. Rheumatoid arthritis usually goes on lifelong and inflammation can not stop by itself, but it can be controlled by anti-rheumatismal drugs effectively, so to say with the help of the medications this disease is held at low disease activity or at remission (inactive state).

Rheumatoid arthritis is a disease of one’s own immune system. In these susceptible people, the cells and the products of the immune system fight against the person’s own joints and organ-systems because they are unable to differentiate between self and non-self. These kind of diseases are known as autoimmune diseases. This disturbance in immunity is caused by genetic tendency, environmental factors and some microbial agents.

In patients with rheumatoid arthritis “shared epitope” which is an amino acid sequence found on a gene called HLA is responsible for development of rheumatoid arthritis .

Rheumatoid arthritis is seen in women 3 times more frequent than in men. The average onset of disease is between 50 and 60 years of age.

In rheumatoid arthritis, firstly the synovium which is the membrane surrounding the joints is inflamed and then the “pannus” tissue is formed . It is this tissue which degrades the joints and cartilages.