

Treatments for children with arthritis

The problem

Many people think of arthritis as joint pain in older adults. But children can also have several types of arthritis. These are called *juvenile idiopathic arthritis*. The immune system attacks children's joints causing pain and swelling. There are important but uncommon risks to childhood arthritis, such as the need for surgery and uveitis (swelling in the eyes). Surgery on the joints can cause negative side effects. Uveitis can cause blindness if doctors don't catch it in time. We want to reduce both surgery and uveitis. Treatments for arthritis in children have improved a lot in the research lab, but we don't know how well these treatments are working in the real world to reduce the risk of surgery and uveitis. To understand this, we followed children with arthritis for 13 years to see how they were doing with treatment.

What we did

We (a team of Swedish rheumatology and paediatric doctors) searched through all the medical records in southern Sweden for children with arthritis. We collected information on these children every year for 13 years, starting from 2002. We checked if the children were having any symptoms of arthritis. We recorded what medications the children were taking and if they had any surgeries or uveitis. We compared these numbers with older data to see changes.

What we found

Out of every ten children:

Almost all children took common pain medications like aspirin and ibuprofen.

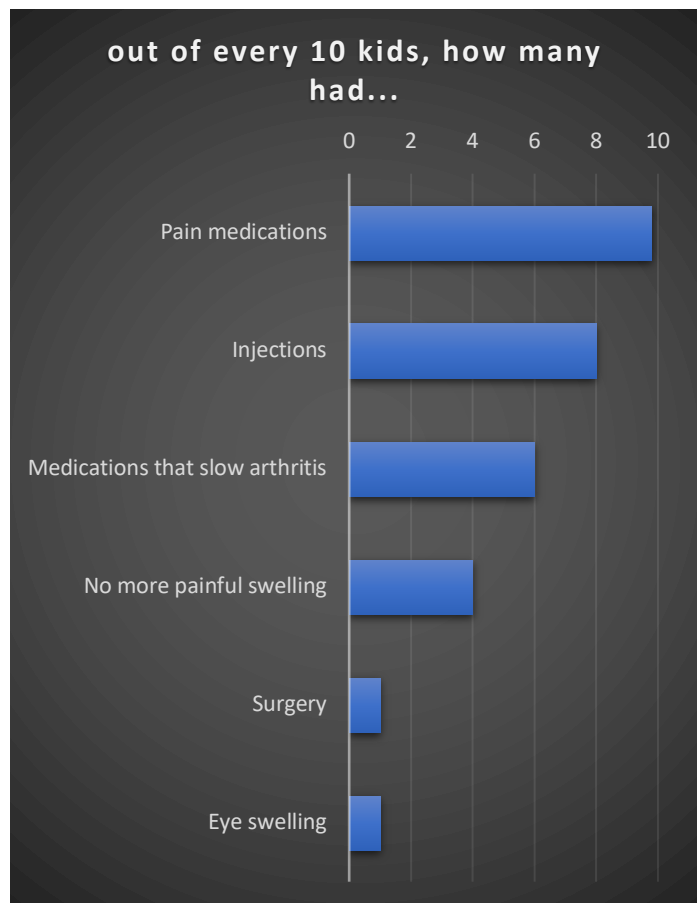
8 needed injections in their joints to reduce the swelling.

6 were taking new medications to slow the arthritis instead of treating the pain.

4 eventually stopped having painful joint swelling.

1 child wound up having joint surgery.

1 child had uveitis (eye swelling).



The take-home message

There is good news! Our new treatments are helping children with arthritis. There is less uveitis and less surgery on joints than in the past. But there is also bad news. These treatments still aren't perfect. More than half of children with arthritis are living with long-term painful swelling. Our treatments for arthritis in children help to avoid surgery and eye problems, but they aren't getting rid of painful swelling in most cases. We have come a long way, but we still have a long way to go.

For more information

Do you want to learn more? Do you want to read the full study? If so, [click here!](#)

Original citation

Berthold, E., Månsson, B., & Kahn, R. (2019). Outcome in juvenile idiopathic arthritis: A population-based study in Sweden. *Arthritis Research & Therapy, 21*(218).
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s13075-019-1994-8>

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