

ORACLE

Fashion and beauty
solutions for people with
rheumatoid arthritis

Clothes that
work for you

Bags and
bling...

A cut above
the rest



The big
OCCASION

Most of us have issues about the way we look. This means we have a complicated relationship with the contents of our wardrobes.

On days when we're feeling good about ourselves, clothes can reflect our confidence. On days when we're not, clothes can cheer us up.

We use clothes to send out messages to other people: *I am business-like, I am sexy, I am up-to-date*. Sometimes deciding what to wear it can be daunting. This is particularly true if you are one of the 487,000 men and women in the UK who have rheumatoid arthritis.^{1,2}

Having RA is a pain in many respects – not least when it comes to fashion. The styles you will find on the high street are not designed to take into account the way the condition can make it hard to put arms through armholes, to reach zips or to do up buttons.

And at times when the pain is bad, the last thing anyone wants to do is to have to struggle getting dressed. Grooming can be a nightmare too. Doing your hair, shaving or putting on make-up is not easy if your joints are swollen and it hurts to lift your arms.

We asked six people with RA to tell us about the challenges they face when it comes to looking their best. We also asked them to tell us about the solutions and tips they have found work for them.

We sought advice from health professionals – including two of Britain's leading rheumatologists, Professor Peter Taylor and Professor Rob Moots, and occupational therapist Dr Lynne Goodacre. We enlisted the expertise of fashion and beauty experts Sinead O'Connell and Sarah Stacey.

This guide is based on their wisdom and experience. We hope the results will inspire you and help you find the answers to your own fashion dilemmas.

¹National Statistics Online, UK Population Estimates. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nugget.asp?ID=6>

²Symmons, D. *et al. Rheumatology*, 2002; 41:793-800

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The cocktail party

I'd like to find a dress to wear in the evenings on special occasions like a cocktail party. The dress has to be easy to put on with no laces or complicated buttons but it has to look smart and classy.

Rosie Buttery

Forget the little black dress – go for a splash of colour. A one shoulder dress like this floaty and feminine emerald green number is easy to slip over the head without even undoing the zip. Once it's on, you can tie the belt to pull it all in and define your waist.

Rosie's tip

Hold-up stockings are easier to put on than tights – and they are sexier. You can even find ones with seams.

MIX AND MATCH

A lightweight knit like this bright red cashmere cardigan is a good alternative to a jacket. It's available by mail order from the Pia catalogue (0870 366 2233 or www.piajewellery.com)



FLOATY & FEMININE

Autograph pure silk frill dress in bright green from M&S



QUICK FIX

Limited Collection elastic strap round toe shoes from M&S



GO FOR GREEN

Bottlegreen dress from the M&S Per Una Speciale range.

Necklace: model's own from Accessorize



The dress you can wear anywhere

Finding clothes that are comfortable yet versatile is always difficult – especially if you want to look elegant.

Kate Llewelyn

Every woman needs this kind of dress in her wardrobe. It's a dress that you can wear to a wedding, to work or out to dinner.

Although it has long sleeves, it is easy to pull on and off because it's made from jersey and has a deep V-neck. The neckline also flatters a larger bust. The colour – a deep bottle green – is a perfect choice for Kate's colouring and the rose details on the hem and round the waist lift the garment out of the ordinary.

TEAM IT UP!

The big tag makes it easy to unzip this large scoop slouch bag in faux leather from M&S



Top tip

Plenty of on-line retailers stock stretchy jersey dresses. Check out Boden or Marisota for example.

**C'EST CHIC!**

**Autograph
ribbed black
jacket and
skirt suit
from M&S**

**ON THE FLAT**

**Red leather
pumps,
model's
own**

**Looking smart**

I work in a hospital with doctors so I need to look smart and professional. I can't find a complete outfit – either the shirts have too many buttons or are too tight, skirts gape, and shoes are a nightmare.

Rosie Buttery

This black wool suit looks the business. The zip on the skirt is at the side, so it's easy to reach and the four buttons on the boxy jacket are nice and large. It looks stunning worn with a cherry red top but the real beauty of a suit like this is that you can dress it up or down.

You could definitely team the jacket with a pair of jeans to wear at the weekend and the skirt would go well with all kinds of different tops.

Dr Lynn's tip

Dr Lynne Goodacre says: Laundry is a consideration so it is worth thinking about buying items that minimise the amount of ironing that will be needed. Look for clothes which use stretch fabric so you can get them on and off easily.

Finding the right clothes to wear when you are neither slobbing out at home or keeping up appearances at work can be a real challenge. Here are some looks that may inspire you when the dress code is smart casual.

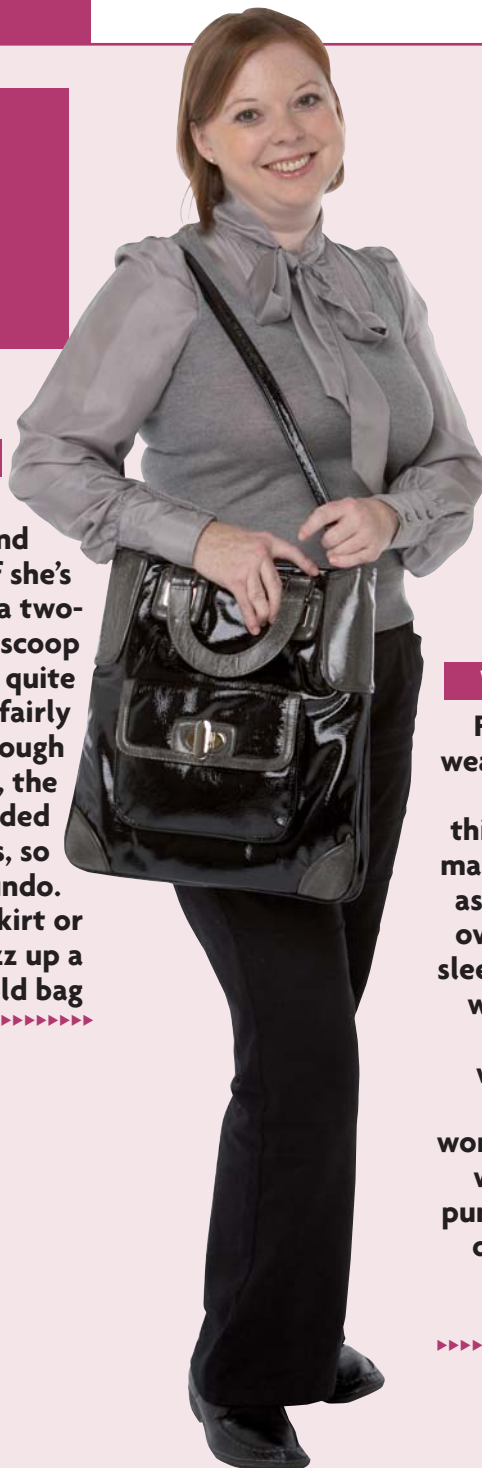
A TIP-TOP TWO-IN-ONE

KATE is wearing an Autograph Essentials grey pussybow silk blend top with cashmere. It looks as if she's wearing layers, but in fact this is a two-in-one. The mock tank top has a scoop neck and the shirt sleeves are quite roomy at the shoulder, so it is fairly easy to put the garment on. Although the long cuffs are buttoned, the buttons themselves are rounded rather than flat like shirt buttons, so they are easier to do up and undo. The top could be teamed with a skirt or trousers. You can always jazz up a classic outfit with a bold bag



Top tip

Thread tape, cord or ribbon through the tab holes in zips to make them easier to grip.



WEEKEND WEAR

ROSIE is also wearing a two-in-one, but this is a dress masquerading as a pinafore over a short-sleeved shirt. If Rosie wore this with black opaque tights it would certainly be smart enough for work. As it is, teamed with socks and red pumps, this pinafore dress from M&S is perfect for the weekend





TWO-WAY STRETCH

TONI has trouble finding jeans that fit – but these have enough stretch for her to get them on and off without too much trouble and are just the right size for her. Here she has dressed the jeans up with a deep purple tie neck top, part of the Autograph Weekend Copenhagen collection, and a wide leather belt. The shoes have a little wedge heel and because they are part of the M&S Footglove range are wider fitting than many



SPLASH OF COLOUR

An Empire line is flattering if you would rather not draw attention to your waist and bright colours add zing to any outfit. Here, Toni wears a magenta cashmere cardigan by Autograph at M&S



Top tip

Clothes like these can be bought online. It may be a good idea to order items in two different sizes if you aren't sure which will fit. But when you are armchair shopping – via the net or from a catalogue – check the returns policy. Some firms make you pay to send things back, others don't. Some have couriers who collect goods, others ask you to take them to the post office. And make sure you check the total cost when ordering as delivery is often charged on top of the listed price.



The T-shirt

I tend to wear T-shirts a lot because they are easy to get on and off – is there an alternative?
 Andy Fiolet

Polo shirts are as easy to wear as T-shirts – but look more stylish. They come in a range of shapes and colours, and you get both long and short-sleeved versions. The pure cotton short-sleeved polo shirt Andy is wearing is in grey marl but also comes in a dark teal version.

ANYONE FOR POLO?

Grey marl cotton polo shirt is from the M&S Autograph range. Other coloured polos from M&S are pictured below. The black leather wide fit shoes are Airflex Comfort, also from M&S. Trousers from a range at M&S



Top tip

If you need to wear a tie for work, just slide it open when you take it off and hang it up still knotted. Then you won't have to reknit it every day. Clip-ons are another solution – online retailers such as www.tiewarehouse.co.uk have more than 50 styles to choose from.



A new look

Once in a while I'd like a change from the hoodies and baggy jeans I normally wear. Any ideas?

Dan Fielding

Cargo trousers are smarter than baggy jeans – and would be ideal if you were going out for a meal with the family rather than hanging out with your mates.

SMART OPTION

Pure cotton cargo trousers, Blue Harbour from M&S



Cardigans are now cool for young guys, especially when worn over a plain white T-shirt. Trainers may be comfortable, but so are shoes with Velcro straps which are easier to put on and off.



The wash'n go hairstyle

It's hard for me to lift a hairdryer so doing my hair presents quite a problem. Bedhead hair was great while it was in, but I can't have that style for ever. I'd like a really funky style I could just wash and go.

Mary Cowern

Mary's big problem is the pain in her wrist, for which she wears a brace; her fingers are generally okay, *writes Sarah Stacey.*

Lesley Drummond of John Frieda's Mayfair salon in London chopped



Mary's hair, which was in floppy layers into a superchic 'pixie' cut, with slightly raggedy edges. It really showed off Mary's huge

eyes, lovely skin and heart-shaped face. Mary just needs to add a little volume then ruffle it dry from the roots after applying a dab of thickening mousse. Lesley showed Mary how to rub the roots between her thumb and forefingers for instant volume, or use a toothbrush to backcomb her hair.

Pump up the volume

My hair tends to be frizzy so I need to blow dry it using a brush and then straighteners. However, using a hairdryer is difficult and I can't get enough volume. Any tips?

Kate Llewelyn

There are two ways forward here: products and technology. I suggest you try the John Frieda Luxurious Volume range, which includes shampoo and conditioner, and great styling products.

The Bountiful Body Mousse, although very light, gives significantly extra fullness, thickness and lift from

root to tip. Simply apply to towel-dried hair: the pump dispenser has a chunky top which should be easy to push, even on a bad hands day.

Do remember that rough-drying your hair with your head upside down and ruffling the roots with your fingers will help increase the

volume immediately. When hair is 80 per cent dry, come up the right way and start styling it.

If your hands allow you to wield the hairdryer, try fitting a nozzle



Lightweight travel dryers, stands or big rollers may help

and smoothing the bits round your face first – John Frieda always says that you can pretty well skip the rest if

you can't manage it for any reason. Keep hair silky smooth by drying downwards so you are working with its natural direction.

If bits are sticking out in the wrong place, remember pretty barrettes or clips – even old-fashioned kirby grips – are perfect to anchor wayward wisps, and are bang on trend.

To help prevent frizz, slip a silk

CONTINUED >>>

Sarah's tip
 You can buy a special cushion to put over the neck of the basin. Take it with you if your hairdressers don't use them and you find leaning back in the sink uncomfortable. For more information check out the Nekeze salon sink cushion for example, at www.nekeze.com

scarf in your bag and pop it on (just like the Queen) the moment there's a drop of rain. A touch of multi-purpose balm, serum or even Vaseline will smooth out frizzies in a trice, too – but you only need the tiniest spot on your finger tips. Use the same product, rubbed between your palms, as an all-over gloss – but again you need very little.

The perfect tan

I'd love to embrace the new natural looking self tan products but as my joints restrict my dexterity (particularly my shoulder and knees) I end up with patches and streaks. What else should I try?

Mary Cowern

Most of us have the same problem. The key to a smooth self tan is to exfoliate for at least one and preferably two or even three evenings before you think of applying it. Use a body polish or scrub, and a glove (the towelling ones should stretch comfortably even over swollen joints). If you're really stuck, make a nice sludgy mix with salt and olive oil and rubadubdub all over.



As far as self tan products go, the consensus is that Estée Lauder's Go Tan Sunless Towelettes are just the ticket for people with achy joints. They're wipes by any other name and very easy to apply.

Sally Hansen now does Airbrush Sun Pre-Tan Exfoliator and Airbrush Sun for Face and Body, which promises not to streak or stain clothes. The website (www.sallyhansen.co.uk) also has lots of tips.

The 5-minute makeover

Could you give some tips on a quick makeup routine to get me out of the house in the morning? On a day when pain and stiffness is at its worst, it's hard to hold mascara brushes or applicators – but those are just the days when you need to give yourself a boost.

Mary Cowern

A basic get-up-and-go make-up is one of the things every woman wants. Make a list of the items you really need. Choose from: concealer, foundation, tinted moisturiser, blush, cream eye shadow, mascara, eyebrow pencil and lippie. You may not need foundation as well as concealer, or you may prefer tinted moisturiser if you have lovely skin.

If applying mascara is difficult, I suggest getting an eyelash tint every four weeks: make up artist



Jenny Jordan says the key to making it last and look fab is to get the therapist to leave it on for 15 minutes. (Do make sure you go to a really reliable salon, there have been very rare occurrences where eyelash tints have led to infection. To avoid an allergic reaction, do a patch test 48 hours before every single session.) You can also have your brows tinted too, if you wish.

When choosing products, look for pots rather than tubes, and for concealer try a foundation stick (Bobbi Brown has both of these). Opt for a cream blush (the Lancôme range is wonderful), and if a lipstick is hard to handle, try a tinted lip balm in a pot. Marks and Spencer's great value make-up ranges are hard to beat for quality so check them out. With these, you can just dip in a finger and apply.

If you can use a blusher brush, that's great: otherwise stroke your two middle fingers across the line of your cheek out to your temples.

It may also help to go back to an elegant dressing table, with a big mirror. Imagine you are sitting on a stool, in front of the mirror. If it's a painful elbows day, rest them on a

narrow cushion. In front of you, arrange your make-up items on a tray (Jenny Jordan says everyone should do this anyway), with lids open. The range of movement you need is then very small – just from the table to your face – and your arm is supported all the way.

Concealing pigmentation

Because I take steroids I get spots and pigmentation. I need advice on how to use concealers and other tips to cover up while still looking natural.

Toni Neufville

First things first: anyone with pigmentation should protect their skin from UV light, which will always make it worse. So use a daily moisturiser with SPF20-25.

If you are on the beach, or water, apply an SPF30 sunblock every two hours. To cover up pigmentation, I suggest using a foundation stick or



creamy concealer in a flip top palette (such as Bobbi Brown's). Dip in your ring finger and dot the product very lightly on to the area you want to cover. Build up the coverage in thin layers to keep your skin looking natural.

To finish, dust your whole face with a mineral powder (which will also help protect your skin from the sun): the fabulous Prescriptives All Skins Mineral Make-up SPF15 is a

powder which comes in 18 shades and gives a great finish. You will need to use a big round brush but you could substitute a powder puff if that's easier to handle.

Inika cosmetics are certified vegan and cruelty free: there's a great website which has lots of problems and solutions (www.inikacosmetics.co.uk).

Inika's Mineral Foundations – again powder formulas – are a concealer, foundation and powder in one, and due to the dense pigments, will completely hide skin blemishes while allowing your skin to breathe.

Dermablend make an excellent range of concealers, used by the Red Cross to hide scars and birthmarks.

Product details: Boots Salon Performance extra large thermogrip rollers; Sassoon Travel 2000W Worldwide family dryer; TRESemmé 2100W Philips hairdryer; Pro-Styling Stand 2000 flexible hairdryer holder available from www.activemobility.co.uk

Kate's tip

If you find you break lipsticks use a lipgloss wand instead. And if you use an eyeliner pencil make sure it's always sharpened to a fine point as it will be easier to apply.



An alternative winter coat

Fashion Extra

I get cold because I'm skinny but I also get hot because of the inflammation. Coats are heavy to hold once you've taken them off. What can I wear when the weather is chilly? Rosie Buttery

Capes or wraps might be the answer. You could carry a pashmina to throw on over a jacket. Genuine pashminas have a very good warmth-to-weight ratio. Suede can be light yet warm. The soft suede coat shown here is meant to be worn unfastened while the Rodeo suede wrap has catwalk-inspired fringing. Both are available from Pia at www.piajewellery.com or call 0870 366 2223

The perfect bag

I'm looking for the perfect bag – it has to have wide straps. It can't be too big or heavy and clutches are out because I'd find them impossible to hold.

Rosie Buttery2

You're in luck because the high street stores are full of the kind of bags you are looking for. The ones pictured here are typical. The straps are wide and the bags themselves aren't too heavy.

Don't cram too much into your handbags – if you need to carry laptops or other heavy items why

not invest in a soft, wheelable shopping bag?

Marks and Spencer have a basic black version but you don't have to look far to find jazzier options.

Verko, a company which sources products to assist people towards easier and more comfortable day-to-day living, has a good selection. Visit www.verko.co.uk or call 0208 201 9444.



Bags galore: (pictured clockwise) Oushka 'Jerry'; Mogil 'Flamingo'; Neesh 'Chi Chi'; KV Patent Tote (all from Red Direct). Tranquillity and Metropolitan Life, (both from Pia)



Bling it on: jewellery

You can change the mood of an outfit by a clever choice of jewellery. If you are finding it hard to do up clasps on necklaces or bracelets, look for on-trend alternatives.

Cuff bracelets can be slipped over the wrist and many are made in lightweight plastics. Elasticated bracelets are everywhere, too – you can wear these three or four at a time. If you have pierced ears, you won't want to be fiddling around with

butterfly clips so look for earrings with hooks that are as long as possible.

Necklaces that can simply be looped over the head are obviously a better bet than those that have to be fastened. Again you should find plenty to choose from whether you are in the supermarket or on the high street.

And keep an eye out for chains that have large T-bar fittings as these can be easier to do up and conventional clasps.



Finishing touches: (pictured above clockwise) freshwater pearl lariat, bamboo coral and bead necklace, silver earrings (all from Pia)

Long necklaces: (pictured left to right) black beads (M&S), discs (Oxfam), glass beads (M&S)



Dr Lynne's tip

The fastenings on some jewellery can be changed or made larger – ask your local jeweller.

Finding fashionable shoes

I'd love to wear skirts more often but I can't find the right shoes. I can't wear flats or high heels as my ankle is fused. I can wear boots in winter if they have zips – but what can I wear the rest of the year?

Kate Llewelyn

It's a big problem for everyone with RA – men as well as women. As Rob Moots, professor of rheumatology at the University of Liverpool, says:

“With RA, the places that tend to be most affected are hands and feet. For instance, feet often become broader because people lose some of the arches – yet fashionable shoes



Look for shoes that have Velcro straps or ones that come in wider fittings like these from M&S



tend to be narrow and tight rather than broad.

“Also, RA can make it painful to wear high heels because these throw the weight forward on to the balls of feet. Fashion shoes also tend to have very thin soles and they can make it feel as though you are walking on pebbles.”

Trainers are a good idea because “they have nice, cushioned soles.”

Luckily, not all of today's trainers look like something only a hip hop star or an athlete would wear.

Many modern styles are a cross between shoe and a trainer, with easy to do up Velcro straps and soles that have a fair amount of thickness and cushioning.

Some brands of shoes have trainer-like qualities, too – they are broader fitting, have thicker soles and Velcro fastenings and aim to be stylish as well as

comfortable. Brands worth a look include Clarks, Ecco, Geox and Fornarina. For shoes that work with skirts, wedge heels can be a good compromise between flats and high heels.

Managing laces

I find it hard to do up shoe laces. Any ideas? Andy Fiolet

You can get elastic shoelaces that will turn a lace-up shoe into a slip-on shoe. They come in black or brown. You lace and tie your shoes in the normal manner just once and then the laces stretch so that you can slip your foot in and out. There are a few suppliers advertising on the internet. One can be found at www.bordersindependentliving.co.uk

Shoe tips

Prof. Moots says: If you are having real difficulties you should ask for an appointment to see an orthotist. Rather than trying to fit your foot into a shoe like Cinderella, you may need shoes to be built to fit your feet. Shoes have got a lot better.

Kate says: I like to have regular pedicures – they help to relax the muscles in the feet. Besides, it's hard to moisturise your own feet and make your nails look nice.

Toni says: Make sure shoes are really comfortable before you buy. Don't think that they'll stretch or that you'll wear them in. They won't and you won't.

Fashion Extra

The bra dilemma

The only way I can do up my bra is to fasten it first before swivelling it round and then putting my arms through the straps. I need a sexy, front-fastening bra – but does that exist? Kate Llewelyn

Most of the front-fastening bras tend to be sports bras or not-very-sexy-at-all support bras. Even a search of the online retailer www.figleaves.co.uk – which has a huge range – produced only one possibility. The Splendour New Diamanté large size backless bra has extra support for larger cup sizes with its lightly padded cups and a slightly wider halter strap. However, it was only available in white and you might find the diamanté chains a little bit of bling too far. The Calvin Klein Perfectly Fit bra was available in sizes 32A to 36D.

Making life easier

DR LYNNE GOODACRE:

- Morning stiffness can make getting dressed more challenging. Having a warm shower before getting dressed can help to relieve this.
- V-neck T-shirts or jumpers are often easier to get on than round-necked ones.
- Consider using gadgets to help you get dressed and undressed more easily.

These include button hooks – their large handles make them

easy to grip and help to pull buttons through the button hole. A simple dressing stick to help bring items such as pants and trousers into reach, or to push straps off the shoulders can be made from a piece of dowling with a plastic-coated cup hook screwed into the end. And a range of products are available to help put on socks and tights.

PROF. PETER TAYLOR:

- Don't put on a brave face for too long. The longer people with RA have the disease the

more they get used to putting up with things. But it's important for patients to work with their GP and secondary care doctor to optimise their condition.

So contact your doctor if you notice you are having prolonged, poorly-controlled discomfort, stiffness, or joint swelling. In other words, something that lasts more than a few days, that is having an impact on your quality of life, particularly impacting on the way you look and feel about yourself, and that you can't regulate with your medication.

With special thanks to . . .

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