

## **Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis**

### *Frequently Asked Questions*

#### **What is Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis?**

Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis (JIA) is a type of inflammatory arthritis that affects children under the age of 16. Arthritis refers to joint inflammation, which causes joint pain, stiffness, swelling, and decreased mobility. Idiopathic means that the cause is unknown.

#### **Who gets it?**

Juvenile arthritis is one of the most prevalent childhood diseases in the United States. There are an estimated 50,000 children and teens in the United States have a form of juvenile idiopathic arthritis. In general, juvenile arthritis is more common in girls. However, certain kinds of arthritis are more common in boys. For example, spondyloarthritis is much more common in boys.

#### **What causes it?**

The exact cause of juvenile idiopathic arthritis is unknown. Researchers believe JIA may be caused by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. This means that something in the environment triggers the immune system to react in an incorrect way, because of genetic factors. There is no evidence that foods, toxins, allergies, or vitamin deficiencies cause the disease. There is no clear evidence that JIA is inherited (runs in families), but there are certain genetic markers that are found more frequently in children and adults with certain types of arthritis. There is also no clear evidence that JIA is caused by infection, but it may be triggered by it.

Please see our flier on **Autoimmune Diseases: What is Happening in My Body?**

#### **How is related to other types of arthritis?**

Arthritis is a widespread condition in the general population and the most common form is osteoarthritis. Many people in a family, particularly relatives in older generations, can have osteoarthritis. Osteoarthritis, however, is unrelated to and does not cause JIA. JIA is not contagious and it is uncommon for other people in the family to develop the arthritis.